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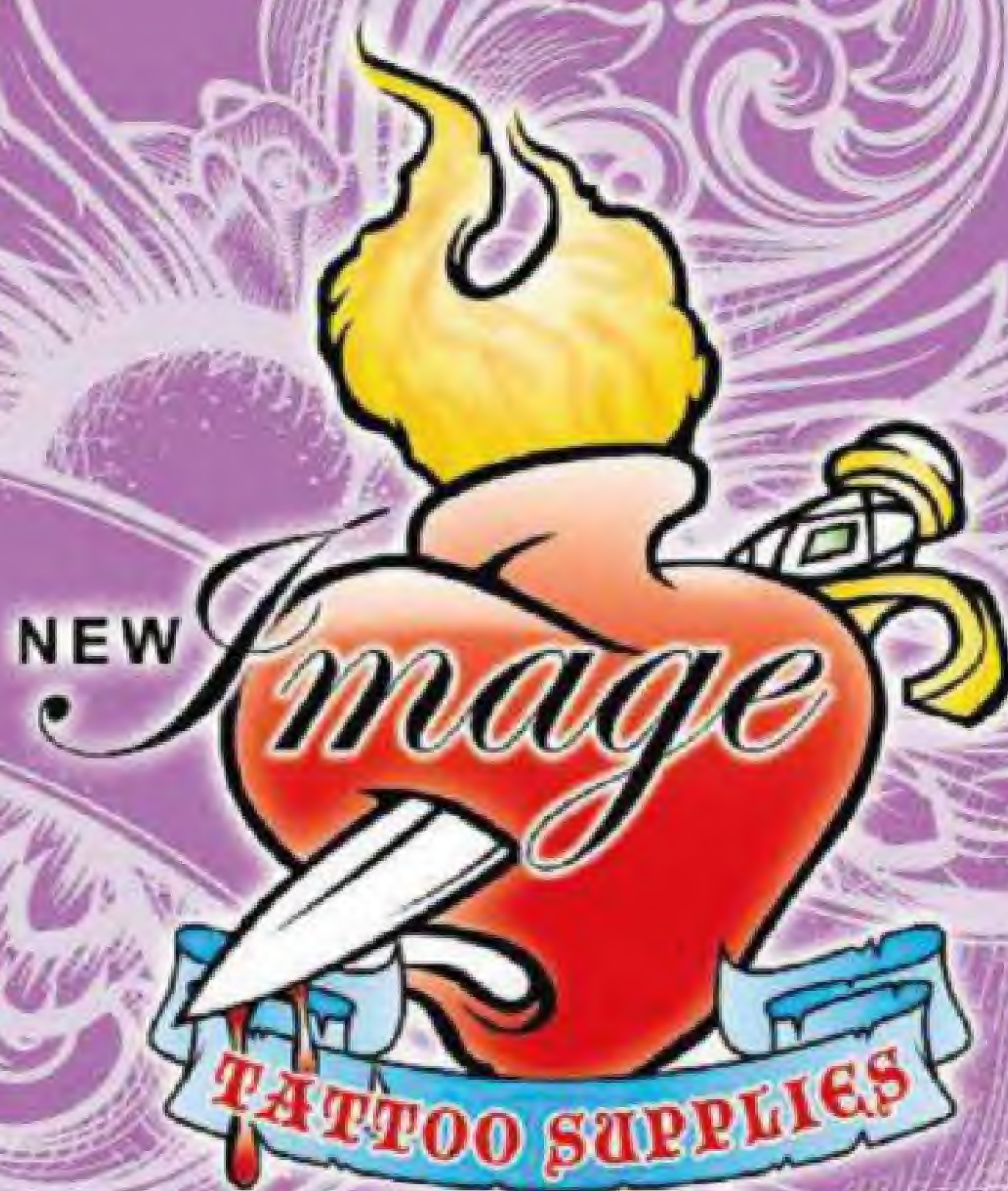
TATTOO

THE WORLD'S GREATEST TATTOO ARTISTS AND DESIGNS

STYLE

FOREWORD BY
JESSE SMITH





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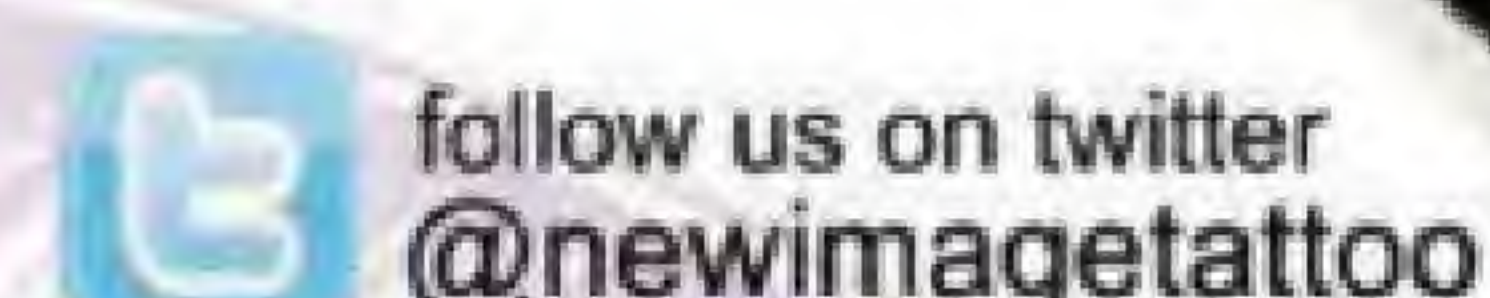
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FOREWORD

As an art movement grows, everyone's work ends up becoming a variation of something that already exists, and it becomes difficult for someone to stand out. Every once in awhile, however, an artist creates a new path.

Most of the time, this artist is unaware of their own impact on the creative community. This ignorance is what keeps them humble and constantly pushing the limits solely to keep themselves entertained. Variations of their work start to pop up and they soon realise that they are being emulated. A fanbase is born and the tables start to turn; their art is no longer just for them, but also for their audience. There is now this overwhelming pressure to please, not only themselves, but also their newfound fanbase. In an effort to describe and share this artist's work, people try to throw it into a category. Once it becomes apparent that the artist's work has surpassed the confines of any pre-existing genre, people inevitably have to create a new one to define it.

The genres of today's art world only exist because of the few artists who have had the courage to push in a different direction. *Tattoo Style* collects a core group of artists who reflect the industry's most prevalent genres. They are considered to be some of the best representations of these styles and are laying a foundation for future generations to branch out and create more elaborate genres. **Jesse Smith**

'Corporate
Consumption'



Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

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Special thanks Darren Brooke, Dave Kinnard and Katie Brooke for their amazing repro work; Ester Segarra, for her incredible tattoo photography

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Tattoo Style ISBN 1-78106-002-9

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WHAT IS TATTOO STYLE?

Sometimes it's possible to look at a tattoo and instantly know who inked it. A geometric swirl creeping from a T-shirt sleeve will be recognisable as the handiwork of Xed Le Head, a black and grey bearded zombie on a leg as a piece by Jason Butcher, or an antlered-up animal as a creation by Uncle Allan. And if the design isn't the work of the artist who springs to mind, it's been tattooed by a skilled admirer who's imitating their style.



All of the tattooists in this book have developed their own unique style of skin art, and have stories to tell about how it evolved – whether they began as apprentices or figured out it on their own, and whether they had studied art or picked up skills as they went along. As well as their achievements on flesh, many tattoo artists have shown amazing paintings in exhibitions, and reproduce their best work on merchandise and prints.

In addition to creating their own art on canvas, more and more tattooists are choosing to host art galleries in their shops, to celebrate the creativity of others and share their appreciation with clients. From Paul Booth's Last Rites Gallery – which has shown work by fellow inkers such as Nick Baxter and renowned masters including H.R. Giger – to Joe Capobianco's lowbrow hub, Hope Gallery Tattoo, and Jesse Smith's new Glitch Gallery. Many artists also run seminars to share their talents or, like portrait master Mike DeVries, release instructional DVDs and books.

Meanwhile, tattoo collectors are so enamored with the inking icons in this book that they'll wait as long as it takes to get an appointment, and travel thousands of miles to offer their flesh up to the needle, giving their bodies as canvases to display works of art until their death. These markings become part of the collector's identity forever. Whether it's an enthusiast of old school tattooing wearing an Angelique Houtkamp sailor girl as well as a striped top, a Robert Atkinson fan with a Western-Oriental back piece and matching custom shoes, or an art aficionado sporting a T-shirt that hides a brilliantly colourful cubist design by Bugs. Soon after the ink has dried, the collector can't imagine their bodies – or, indeed, themselves – without their tattoo(s).

Tattoo culture is getting more diverse by the day, and the art of marking the body is constantly progressing in exciting new ways. So join us in a celebration of the greatest artists and the best designs, as well as the people who collect them on their skin. This is Tattoo Style.



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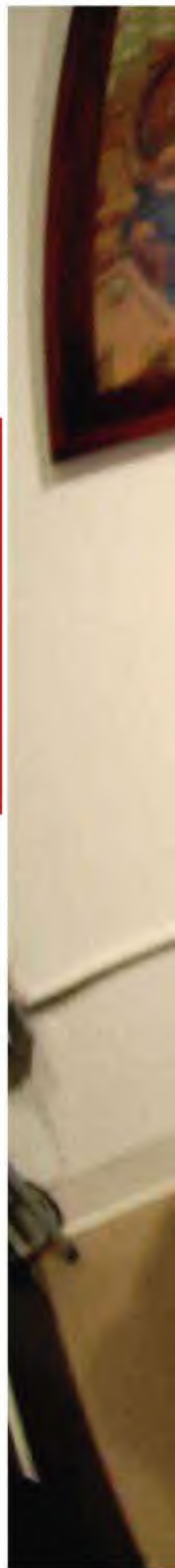
CARTOONICON

JESSE SMITH

THE BRIGHT CHARACTER WHO'S
LOONY TUNES FOR CARTOONS 

Combining self-taught tattoo techniques with a background in illustration, Jesse Smith produces full-colour cartoony designs that look like *Ren And Stimpy* crossed with *Lilo & Stitch*. "It's the only style that I feel reflects my personality," explains Jesse. "I typically tattoo in layers to create something super-saturated and high-contrast."

The inker has honed his distinctive art over 14 years, and has also developed a narrative that runs through many of his designs, set in a fantasy world called Ferchett's Island. It features a lagoon and jungles, and includes vibrant creatures such as Gwong The Squirrel-Catcher and Skeach The







Zombie Squirrel. “A lot of my characters and stories seemed to overlap here and there, so I decided to create a place for them to live,” explains Jesse. “Over the past couple of years it has grown into something even bigger than I could have imagined.”

“I FEEL THAT MY **CARTOONY TATTOO** **STYLE** REFLECTS MY PERSONALITY”

1 This 'Vicious Vulture' took 14 hours to complete
2 'Corporate Brainwash'
3 'Oppression', which is a comment on the Government setting us up to fail

THE ART OF WAR

Jesse dreamed about going to art school when he was younger, but his family couldn't afford the fees, so he enlisted in the army. But while he was learning to use weapons, he was influenced by an “artistic type” called Carlos, who was tattooing out of his house in Newport News, Virginia.



“Carlos and I would hang out and draw a lot together,” remembers Jesse. “He soon taught me how to make a ghetto gun – made from a single needle, a toothbrush and a Walkman motor – and I ventured off to do my first tattoo. It was a tribal wolf howling at a tribal moon.”

Although Jesse had only planned on doing one design, word of his work spread, and people started lining up at the door to go under his needle. “They didn't queue for me because my tattoos were good, but because they were cheap!” he laughs.

After three years in the military, Jesse got the G.I. Bill (Government money for college) and left for Richmond, to study at Virginia Commonwealth University. While he was there, he landed a job in a shop called Altered Images and inked “run-of-the-mill tattoos”, including names, Chinese symbols, tribals, flowers and butterflies. Five and a half years of study later, he walked away from college with a BA in Fine Art, specialising in illustration, and a wealth of tattoo experience under his belt.

FANTASY ISLAND

Despite being self-taught, Jesse learned a few things about wielding a needle when he went to tattoo alongside Bugs (p94), from London's Evil From The Needle, who specialises in a painterly style that looks like it belongs on canvas rather than on skin. “I never got an apprenticeship, and looking back I really wish I had, because it would have saved me from making a lot of really stupid mistakes,” reveals Jesse. “But working alongside Bugs and his colleagues really kicked my tattooing up a couple of notches.”

Over the years, Jesse has developed Ferchett's island. His favourite piece linked to the story is 'Killick Falls Lagoon', a back piece that stretches down and around the legs of a client called Jenny, and took 300 hours to complete during a 10-year



“WORKING ALONGSIDE **BUGS** KICKED MY
TATTOOING UP A COUPLE OF NOTCHES”



"I ENJOY SHARING ART WITH OTHER PEOPLE THROUGH MY GALLERY"

- 4 'Killick Falls Lagoon' – an area of Ferchett's Island, inked on the legs and back of a client called Jenny. It includes creatures such as 'turtle fish', 'thinker fish' and 'duhfish'
- 5 'Pink Bulldog' took four hours to ink
- 6 'Pinjatta' was tattooed on a client called Matt, who was concerned about getting a chest piece on his 'ribblet' – a congenital deformity where a bit of his ribcage sticks out – so Jesse composed the piece around it. It took 25 hours to tattoo



period. The bright blue lagoon on the east side of Ferchett's Island is home to endearing creatures such as Stockter The Turtle Fish, Crusty The Curious Crab, and a tentacled Guhnoctopus.

Jesse's now working with other artists – including fellow cartoony inkers Scott Olive and Tanane Whitfield – on a larger artistic concept, which includes Ferchett's Island, called the Continent Of Ghal. "We're still in the beginning stages of the project, but it seems to be forming quickly..."

he explains, cryptically. He also hopes to bring some of his characters to life in a videogame or cartoon.

SHOW AND TELL

Aside from his art on flesh, Jesse still paints on canvas. His favourite work is 'The Dumb Politician', where a besuited man unthinkingly draws up laws. It took 100 hours to complete, and Jesse felt like it was the first piece he'd produced in a style that wasn't influenced by his art school tuition. "I felt it came completely from me," he reflects.

When the time came for Jesse to open his own shop – Loose Screw Tattoo in Richmond, in May 2011 – he also created Glitch Gallery to show the art of others. He's promoted work by Travis Franklin, and is set to display the talents of Scott Olive and Tanane Whitfield. "I really love art of all mediums and Glitch Gallery gives me the opportunity, and an additional reason, to be more involved with artists who I might not have the chance to converse with otherwise," Jesse explains. "I also really enjoy sharing art with people and having a gallery creates a good outlet for that."

With so many ideas on the go, Jesse's often torn between his twin passions of marking flesh and marking canvas, but luckily for us he manages to do both – just. "I probably paint, draw or tattoo everyday. Everything in my schedule moves in waves," says Jesse. "Sometimes I'm overwhelmed with tattoos to draw and can't find time to paint. Other times I'm painting so much that I can't find time to draw. And most of the time I'm tattooing so much I can't find time for either..."



7 'Skeach The Zombie Squirrel', who spent two years wandering the ocean feasting on the brains of bunny fish on Ferchett's Island
8 'Gwong The Squirrel-Catcher'
9 'Devil Head' hand tattoo



CARTOON GALLERY



1

TATTOOIST Patryk at Rock'n'Roll Tattoo, Edinburgh

COLLECTOR Keziah Stevenson, Edinburgh: "My friend Patryk drew this cute yet dark Pinocchio design, and I fell in love with it."

TATTOOIST Rae at Inka Tattoos, Brighton

COLLECTOR Zoe Minihane, Brighton:

"This is an ice cream lady. I love ice cream!"

TATTOOIST Bez at Triplesix Studios, Sunderland

COLLECTOR Jeanette Linan, Leeds: "I wanted something girly, happy and colourful."

TATTOOIST Jesse Smith at Loose Screw Tattoo, Richmond, Virginia, USA

COLLECTOR Rianne Rowlands, Runcorn:

"This guinea pig riding a jackalope will become part of Jesse's 'Ferchett's Island' story he documents in tattoos."

TATTOOIST Chris Jones at Physical Graffiti, Cardiff

COLLECTOR Steve Collier, Cardiff: "These are designs from films I like, including *Watchmen* and *RoboCop*."



2



6



TATTOOIST Tiffany Westbrook at Lefty's Tattoo, California, USA
COLLECTOR Alan Macias, San Francisco, California: "I had the *Burning Man* symbol tattooed on my right buttock to remind me of the mind-bending experience I had at the festival, and I did the artwork for the rest of my 'shorts'."

TATTOOIST Jesse Smith at Loose Screw Tattoo, Richmond, Virginia, USA

COLLECTOR Mat Lapping, Hull: "Jesse inspires me in my tattoo art, so I got this snowman fighting an octopus."

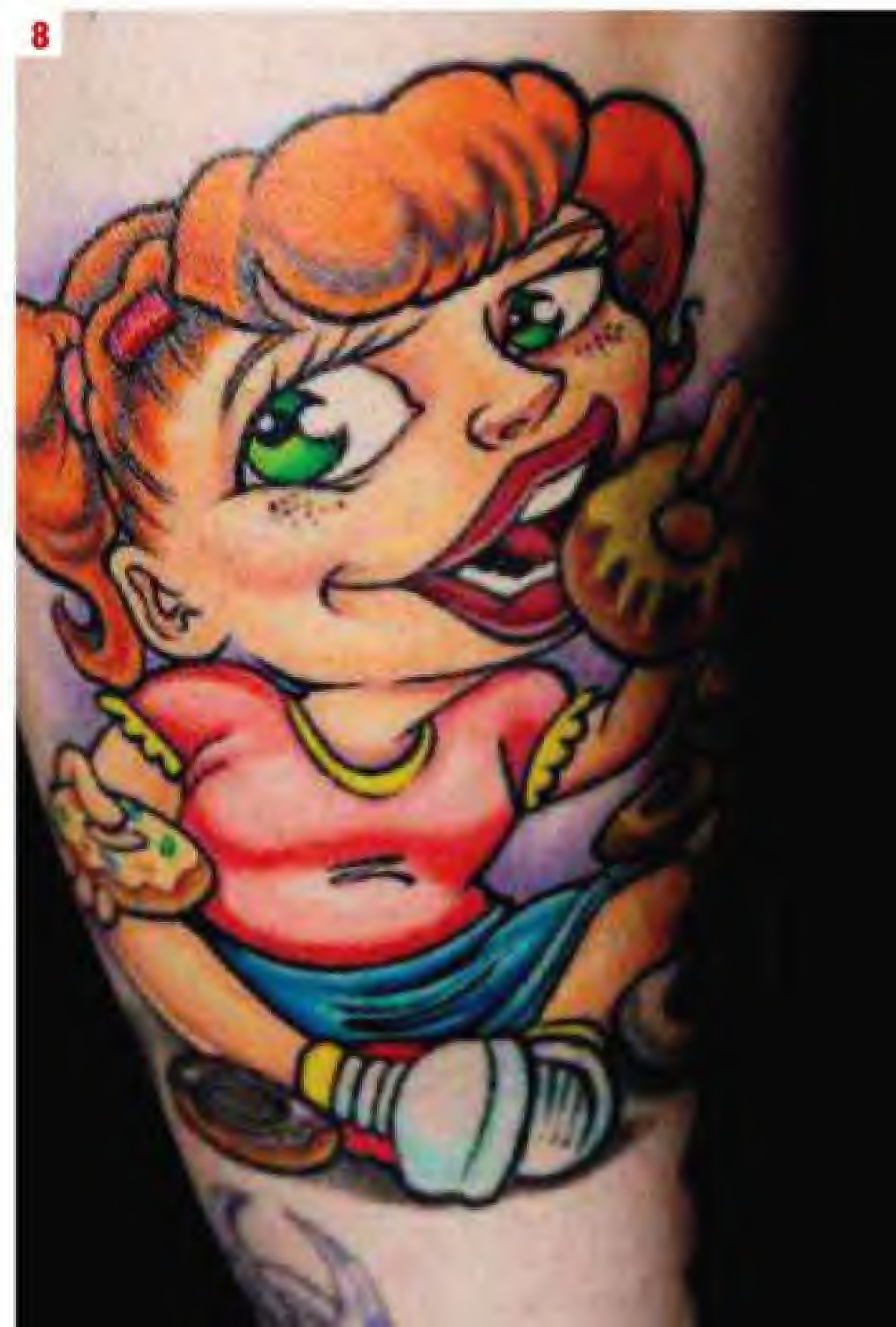
TATTOOIST Tony Ciavarro at Stinky Monkey Tattoos, Kingston, Massachusetts, USA

COLLECTOR Sam Sorci, Cardiff: "I like doughnuts, and she's the cutest little girl - I've named her Chloe!"

7



8





9



11



10

- 9 TATTOOIST** Andy Walker at Creative Vandals, Hull
COLLECTOR Alex Dyer, Hull: "For my tattoos, I choose different characters from my childhood, such as this design of Wolverine from *X-Men*."
- 10 TATTOOIST** Nutz at Nutz Tattoo, Hertfordshire
COLLECTOR Chris Hollingsworth, Essex: "I've loved anime and manga for years, and this sleeve includes Yuri and Kei from *Dirty Pair* and Rally from *Gunsmith Cats*."
- 11 TATTOOIST** Mat Lapping at Creative Vandals, Hull
COLLECTOR Josh Briers, Hull: "*Space Jam* is my favourite film, and this tattoo was done at Milton Keynes Tattoo Convention."

PIN-UP-ICON

JOE CABOBIANCO

THE GODFATHER OF GLAMOUR GIRLS
WHO SWITCHED CANVAS FOR SKIN



Ask Joe why he started inking girls, and he'll ponder the question, before breaking into a grin. "Some inner thing attracted me to the female form – my love of women, I guess," he says. "But in tattooing, the pin-up style is timeless. It's been around for as long as anybody has been doing tattoos. And there's worse things to be doing in the world than inking pin-up girls all day long..."

For 18 years, Joe Capobianco has spent his waking hours tattooing his unique brand of pin-up skin art – busty, sultry, sexy, femme fatales – on to thousands of devotees, winning big-time recognition and numerous awards at tattooing events. His 1950s-inspired style of woman even has its own name: the 'Capo Girl'. Despite looking like a ruthless mafia-made man, 42-year-old Joe is laid-back and good-humoured – more Tony Curtis than Tony Soprano. However, the godfather of pin-up tattoos





remains modest, even admitting he had no intention of being involved with ink when he was younger. "I never thought of myself as being tattoo material, or being heavily tattooed," he admits.

DARK ART

An artist foremost, Joe had already developed his unique style, influenced by pin-up artist Olivia De Berardinis and Japanese illustrator Hajime Sorayama, before wielding a needle. But in 1993, while working as a freelance designer for a T-shirt company, a chance opportunity led him to tattooing.

"I was 21, and a bunch of friends and I got tattooed as a group," he recalls. "It was my first tattoo – Porky Pig and Daffy Duck on my upper arm. The guy who inked me saw my artwork and said I should be a tattoo artist. He hounded me for a year and half. Then I lost my freelance job and he offered me an apprenticeship the day after. I haven't looked back since."

The year Joe spent as a rookie at Cliff's Tattoo, in Centereach, Long Island, was a huge learning curve. The transition from paint and canvas to skin and ink made him nervous, but he was still cocky. "At first I thought I'd pick up tattooing super-quick and excel at it," he continues. "But I met Paul Booth (p104) in my second week of the apprenticeship and he was doing incredible stuff on skin. I was blown away. That was the swift kick up the nuts I needed."

ON THE SAME PAGE

Cockiness dispelled, Joe took to tattooing quicker than a Mafioso takes to making concrete footwear. "Every tattoo I've done has been exciting. Even a tiny rose that takes just 10 minutes – I'm always super-jazzed to do it," he says, with relish.



Although it was during this period, three years into his career, that Joe acquired the unfortunately brutal nickname 'Joey Razorblades'. "I was working on my barber, who also used to be a body piercer,"

- 1 'The Bride Of Frankenstein'
- 2 A zombie geisha
- 3 A kitty girl
- 4 A monster gal

"I GUESS MY LOVE OF WOMEN IS WHAT ATTRACTS ME TO THE FEMALE FORM"

he explains. "Back in the day, we used single needles, like tight threes (three needles soldered together in a triangle), but he had a lot of new school ink on him that was done using nine or 10 round needles. The tight threes hurt like a bitch, so after I worked on him he coined the phrase 'Joey Razorblades' and, unfortunately, it stuck."



Despite the nickname, Joe's career continued on an upward trajectory until, five years in, it took off like Joe Pesci's temper in *Goodfellas*. "Someone came in looking for a Bettie Page pin-up," he

"MY **BETTIE PAGE** TATTOO GOT PUBLISHED, AND THEN EVERYONE WANTED ONE"

5 Pirates, *Star Wars* and mermaids are an influence on Joe's girls
6 A sexy Day Of The Dead Capo Girl

remembers. "It got published and then everyone started asking for a Bettie Page." Since then, the 'Capo Girl' has assured his place as a tattoo icon.

REAL HORRORSHOW

These days, Joe can be found working out of his jointly owned shop Hope Gallery Tattoo in

New Haven, Connecticut, where he lives with wife Alethea and a French Bulldog called Molly. When Joe's not tattooing, he's branching out into unique projects. This year he joined forces with designer toy company Kidrobot to produce a limited edition Bride Of Frankenstein figurine, called 'The Bride', which was a hit among tattoo industry folk – "we absolutely killed it," smiles Joe. The inker may also illustrate a horror-themed cookbook using a pin-up style he calls 'blood pudding'. "It's my take on the cheesecake style, but just straight-up darker," he says.

Big-quiffed Joe is even producing his own brand of hair pomade. But even though the 1950s-style masculine glamour-puss is the king of style, he doesn't like attention. "I have ridiculous hair and I already stand out, so I don't want any more attention," he laughs, before pausing to add, "but as much as I don't like it, I hope the attention never goes."



PIN-UP GALLERY

TATTOOIST Paul Naylor at Powerhouse Tattoos, Northwich

COLLECTOR Michelle Williams, Anglesey, Wales: "I have Audrey Hepburn on my left arm, and Bettie Page and Marilyn Monroe on my feet. The foot tattoos were my wedding present - I had an Elvis ceremony in Las Vegas."







TATTOOIST

Jimmy Needles
at Beverley Ink,
East Yorkshire,
and Nettie at
Lucky 13, Hull

COLLECTOR Mandy
Brignall, Beverley:
"I like anything to
do with the 1950s,
when women knew
how to dress with
style and elegance."

TATTOOIST Julia
Seizure at Flamin'
Eight, Kentish
Town, London

COLLECTOR Sharron
Caudill, Liverpool:
"I wanted to get
something old
school and nautical
on my leg. My
sailor girl even
has tattoos!"



3



4

TATTOOIST Michelle Clifford at Dragon Images Tattoo Studio, Bilston, West Midlands

COLLECTOR Steve Perry, Wolverhampton: "I'm into rockabilly music and the 1950s, so I like Betty Boop and I have other pin-up girl tattoos."

TATTOOIST John Anderton at Nemesis Tattoo Studio, County Durham

COLLECTOR Michelle Maddison, County Durham: "This is John's amazing interpretation of a piece by lowbrow artist Caia Koopman."

5



XED LE HEAD

THE SHAPE SHAMEN BLESSED
WITH DIVINE INSPIRATION



“When clients come to see me, they’re entering Xed-time,” says Xed Le Head, the geometrically obsessed genius and dot work tattoo trailblazer. “Don’t have anything booked after an appointment with me because I can’t be cajoled into starting before I want to. It’s not unusual for my 12 o’clock appointment to begin at three or four.”

For over 30 years, Xed has been marking skin with the surety of a Spirograph. He started out inking by hand when he was just 13 years old – tattooing himself and friends – but didn’t progress into the industry full-time until he was 24. And even then he spent several nomadic years working in England and across Europe before he began working in studios. The man has taken time to learn the craft and, likewise, he takes his time when tattooing his



meticulous designs. He purposefully paces the studio of Divine Canvas, his North London shop, and takes considerable pauses before articulating his thoughts. But this laid-back attitude hasn't always ingratiated Xed to colleagues or clients.

"THERE'S **MATHS INVOLVED** IN MY INKING, BECAUSE EVERY BODY IS IMPERFECT"

"I tell him to hurry up because there are other customers waiting," interjects fellow Divine Canvas inker 'Mad' Alan. "And Xed says: 'Shut up, I'm doing something, you doughnut!'" Meanwhile, Xed recalls almost being assaulted by customers who were upset with their tattoo's painfully slow progress.

PERFORMING GEOMET-TRICKS

But even Alan concedes that good things come to those who wait – and Xed produces amazing things. With working methods incorporating computer imaging and maths in the search for perfect symmetry, Xed is one of tattoo's geekiest exponents. He approaches appointments with methodical precision. "Myself and the client will spend a lot of time talking about what they want

1 Bright patterns inked on the head of Xed's colleague, 'Mad' Alan

2 Some dot work on client Lauren Stephens' arm



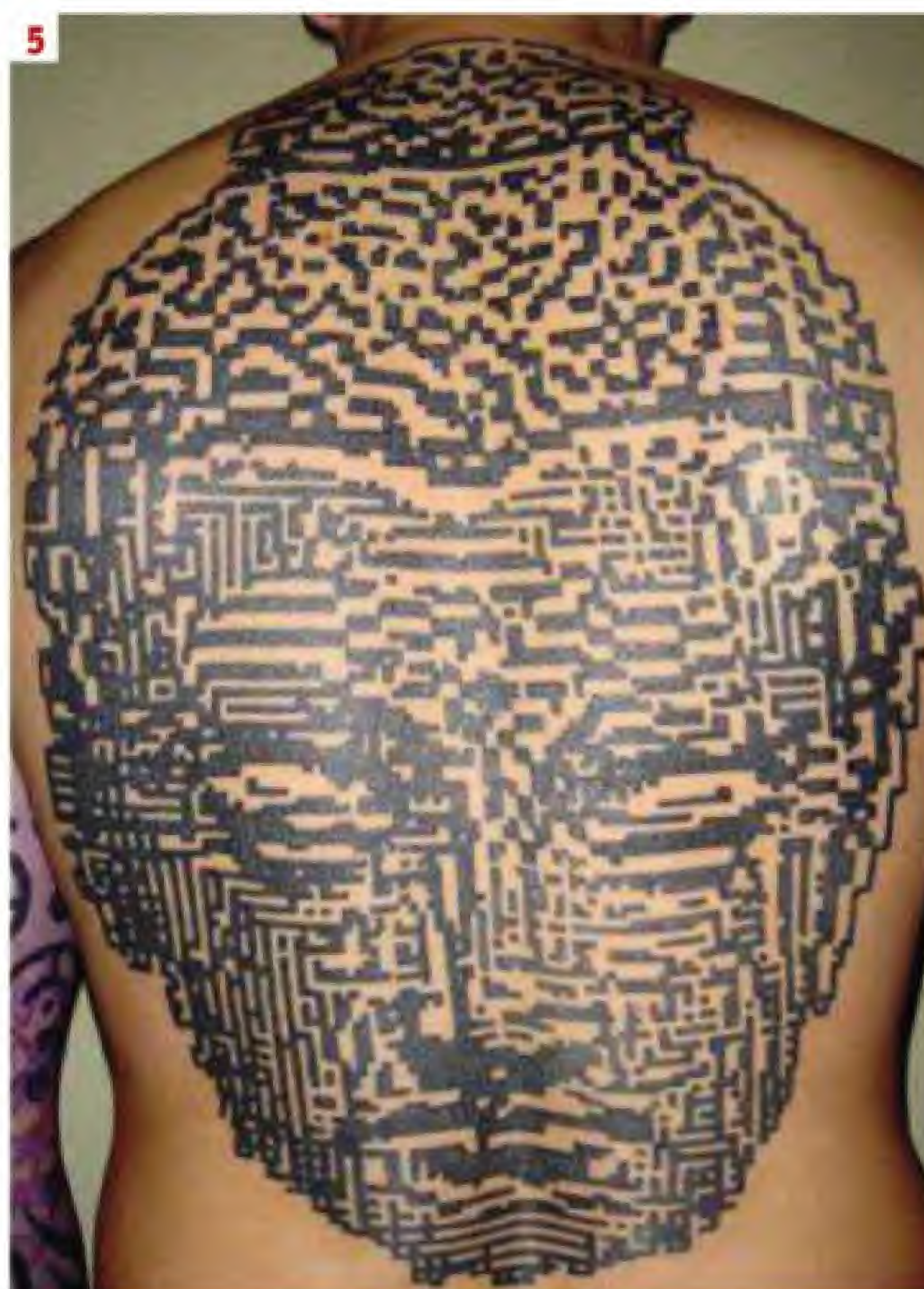
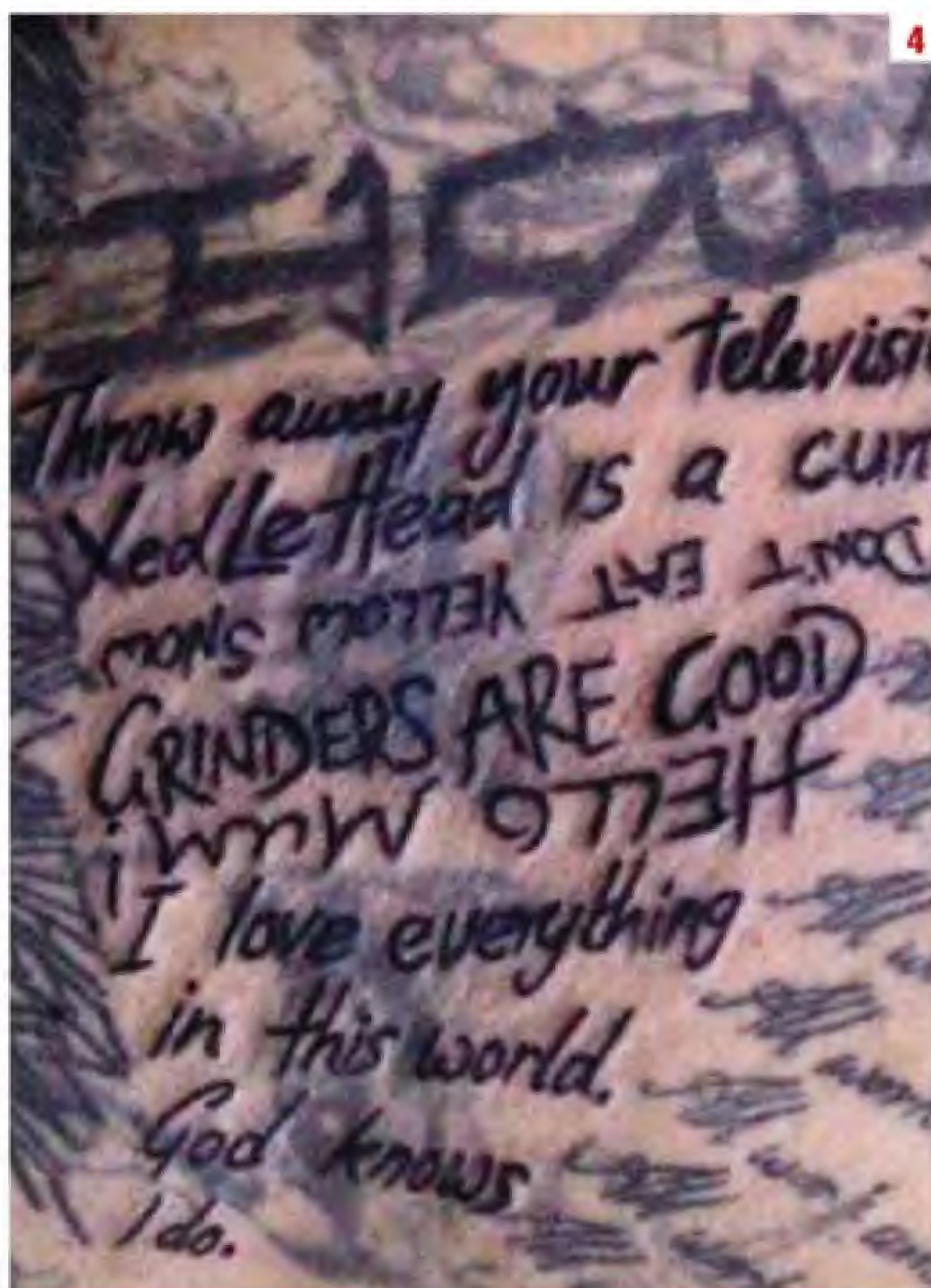
to express," he says. "We look at some of my best work and they pick out their favourite pieces and we discuss what's good about them. Then we build a computer folder with pattern images. It might start out with 200 images, before being narrowed down to about a dozen."

After that, Xed will examine the client's body shape to decide how to place the tattoo. "There's maths involved, since every body is imperfect," he adds. "The body is not perfectly symmetrical and, when doing a back piece, for instance, you have to take into account the curvature of the spine. Plus, there can be a discrepancy in skin surface from the spine to the armpit line of up to an inch and a half – which is a problem if you're trying to do a symmetrical back piece, because you'll never get it to sit straight."

Talking to Xed can occasionally seem more akin to a casual chat with a mathematics professor or a computer nerd. Yet despite such a technical process, Xed maintains his work is spontaneous. "I work organically. My style is about capturing a moment, and about feeling. And it's about the journey too – the end result is of great importance but the experience itself matters," he explains. "My aim is to make people more attractive, more sexy, than they perceive themselves. My work is tailored to individuals; I'm trying to bring out a piece of your soul that displays who you are, and then add a piece of my soul to it."

DOWNWARD SPIRAL

Xed's renowned style has allowed him to work on some well-known characters, including Lucky Diamond Rich. But despite the obvious respect he's attained for his talent, Xed remains uncomfortable when critiquing his own work. He admits to a lack of confidence, which culminated in "the worst black



- 3 This mudra was inked on Xed's friend Alice
- 4 Xed contributed to a cover-up piece on his pal Steve A
- 5 This design was adapted from a photo of a carved Buddha head

6



6 The palms of Xed and tattoo wonder Lucky Diamond Rich. The 'X' symbolises drug freedom

period" of his life. "About two years ago I stopped working for months, shut my website, and hid my portfolios so no-one could see them," he says. "Alan dragged me out of it. There was too much scrutiny. I'm better now than I've ever been at accepting it. It's a weird duality because I know

"I'M TRYING TO BRING OUT A PIECE OF YOUR SOUL, AND ADD ONE OF MY OWN"

7 This spiral was done on an Argentinian tattooist

I can talk to anyone about the technical process of dot work, but I still see myself as more of a thief than an artist. I'm always stealing stuff and trying to adjust it into my own. But then I've spoken to great artists, and they say all artists thieves."

SACRED ART

Interestingly, the technophile's reliance on geometry belies an appreciation for spiritual matters. He's fascinated by holy writing, in particular Tibetan calligraphy. "I'm increasingly drawn to trying to portray something divine in my work," he enthuses. "I like the phrase, 'Art without knowledge is empty.' So I've been drawn towards mantras and holy writings as tattoos. A conscious human being is the most sacred thing on earth. So using holy writings, the most sacred thing I can find, to decorate human beings, the most sacred thing I can see, is becoming a paramount part of my work."

Still, mischievous Xed isn't shy about exploring less worthy concepts. "I used to make obscure business cards that just had a mantra or a picture of a swastika on them," he says. "I've even got a business card that's a mandala (a circular pattern) of my own penis. But they only go to girls."



GEOMETRIC GALLERY





- 1 TATTOOIST** Julie Clarke at Flaming Gun Tattoo Studio, Colchester
COLLECTOR Steven Docherty, Colchester: "I really like the 3-D effect of my geometric work."
2 TATTOOIST Xed Le Head at Divine Canvas, King's Cross, London
COLLECTOR Paulo Cruzes, London: "This is a tattoo of the Flower Of Life, which is composed of evenly-spaced, overlapping circles. It's beautiful and meaningful to me."





3



4

TATTOOIST Joe Munroe, Bournemouth, and at Divine Canvas, King's Cross, London
COLLECTOR Jack 'Dobby' Denney: "Joe and my friends kept holding me down and shaving my eyebrows off, so I got them tattooed on."
TATTOOIST Cris Bagnall, Nicola Bagnall and Martin Poole at Aquaries Tattoo Studio, Bude, Cornwall
COLLECTOR Martin Poole, Bude: "I tattooed my face by using a mirror."
TATTOOIST Patrick Hüttlinger at Sakrosankt, Germany
COLLECTOR Gareth Kirk, Newtown, Wales: "This is a cover-up of rubbish tribal work."



5

6

TATTOOIST Joe Munroe, Bournemouth, and at Divine Canvas, King's Cross, London

COLLECTOR Deryn Stephenson, Sheffield: "I've always been drawn to geometric patterns, and I tattoo them too."

TATTOOIST Xed Le Head at Divine Canvas, Kings Cross, London, and Steve Abraham at Indelible Tattoo, Bournemouth

COLLECTOR Joe Munroe, Bournemouth: "I got my forehead done first, and then built up little sections. It was a journey."

7

OLD SCHOOL ICON

ANGELIQUE HOUTKAMP

THE PAINTED LADY WHO BRINGS
FEMININITY TO SAILOR TATTS 



Whether she's painting a two-headed lady swashbuckler or a Louise Brooks-style beauty popping out of a teapot, Angelique Houtkamp's work brings a finer edge to old school designs. And Amsterdam was the perfect place to learn her craft: "Because Amsterdam is a port – and in the 1950s soldiers stationed in Germany came here during their leave – navy and military designs are popular. A lot of the flash you see on the walls of tattoo shops is old school," says Angelique.

The inker never shies away from the skulls and mythical beasts that wouldn't look out of place on the arm of a salty seadog, and her ink is underpinned by an intangible layer of darkness – whether it's delicate skull-lines etched on a flapper girl's face or





blood dripping from the sword of a sexy pirate girl. But her genteel take on this familiar imagery could explain why more than 70 per cent of her clients are women. Each year, dozens of her female admirers travel to Amsterdam to go under the needle.

“MOST OF THE **FLASH** YOU SEE IN TATTOO SHOPS IN AMSTERDAM IS OLD SCHOOL”

ART HISTORY

Angelique Houtkamp was born in the Dutch city of Uithoorn in 1968, and moved to Amsterdam when she turned 18. But while she was a creative child, a lack of direction put her on an unconventional path to tattoo fame. “I found it hard to focus as a kid,” she sighs. “My art teachers went crazy for my stuff, but when I had to study art history I just switched off. Most artists I know have been passionate about what they want to do from a young age, but when I was younger I’d draw like mad for six weeks, then not pick up a pen for a year.”

After moving to Amsterdam, Angelique embarked on four years of partying and playing in death metal

- 1 A Femke Hiemstra design Angelique tattooed on her friend Iris
- 2 A brightly coloured owl on Karin
- 3 A ‘champagne socialista’ on client Betsan
- 4 ‘Marie’



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bands, and gravitated towards the seedy world of ink. “I hung out in this tattoo shop, and I thought it’d be a cool place to work,” she says. “I started designing tattoos on paper, and dropped into the shop every week to show them what I was doing. This was during the early 1980s, when the atmosphere was different, and tattoo shops were rowdy and dangerous. Some days they’d look at my drawings, but at other times they’d yell at me to get out!”

“Amsterdam is also a magnet for tattoo artists,” Angelique continues. “Hanging around tattoo shops I got to know artists from all over the world. It was a great way to find out about tattoo history, and I learned lots about being an apprentice without touching a needle.”

THE HOLE STORY

Despite making the right connections, Angelique struggled to find her feet in Amsterdam, and had to take odd jobs to make ends meet. But a chance meeting set her on a path that’d lead her back to the world of tattoos. “I got to know this American girl who opened a piercing studio in Amsterdam, and she offered me a job,” Angelique says. “Like tattoos, piercing was underground in the 1980s, and we’d get abuse on the street for having navel



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piercings. But the shop took off, and suddenly we had lines of girls along the street wanting to get their navel pierced!"

After two years skewering flesh, Angelique took a sidestep into crafting jewellery. But despite being able to indulge her creativity, making golden trinkets didn't offer the rewards she wanted. Luckily, though, her big break was just around the corner. "I had a tattooist friend who owed me money," she says. "I told him if he could persuade his boss to give me an apprenticeship, he'd never have to pay me back. And he did!"

Skipping the slog of scrubbing equipment, tedious tribals and verbal abuse that many apprentices endure, Angelique's plan saw her going straight to work; getting the hang of using tattoo machines by colouring inside lines inked

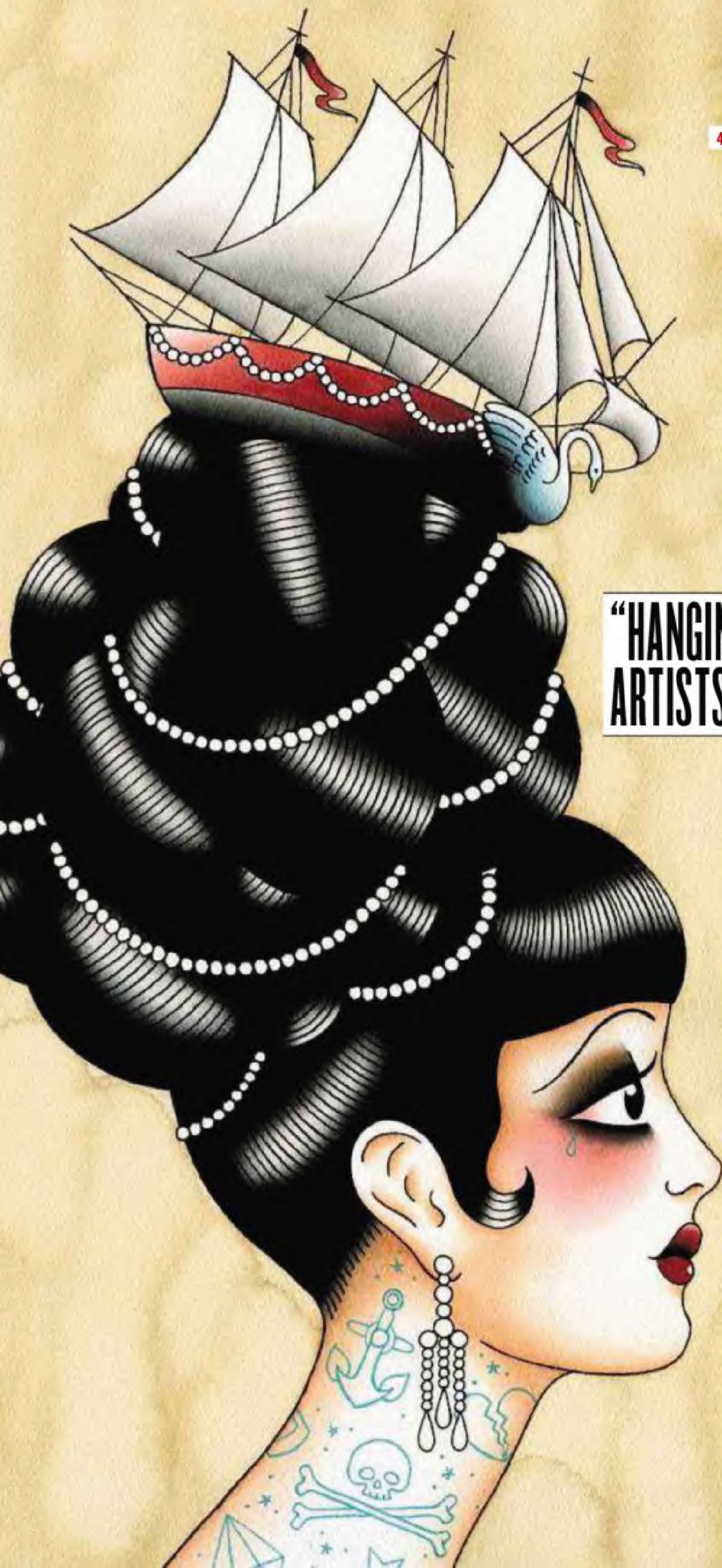
"HANGING AROUND **TATTOO SHOPS**, I MET ARTISTS FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD"

by experienced staff, and doing simple designs from scratch. "I had a friend who wanted me to tattoo him, so I was able to prove myself more quickly than most," she says. "My first attempts didn't turn out too badly, and when I see him today they still look pretty good."

As Angelique's confidence grew, she put more of her flash on the studio wall, and soon customers were specifically asking for her ("They got half-price deals because I was a beginner, which helped," she says). But while her tattooing career seemed unstoppable, it was Angelique's work on canvas that'd cause the biggest stir.

WATERCOLOUR WORLD

After a year Angelique moved to Tattoo Peter, one of the oldest studios in Europe, and began working alongside artists from the USA, Italy and France. She'd been painting with acrylics, but advice from her colleagues on watercolours was a key step in developing her retro style. "Most tattooists in the 1900s used watercolours to create flash," she says. "They're not normally thought of as part of tattoo history, but watercolours are a vital part of the old school style. I always hated them, but at the studio my colleagues taught me about using black lines



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ANGELIQUE

VII



and shading with watercolours, and I began to develop my own work."

In her spare time, Angelique made prints that she sold at tattoo conventions. When she heard that a local gallery was staging an exhibition of pin-up art, her life changed forever. "It was 2000, and I heard about this pin-up show the night before it opened," she says. "I'd just finished a painting, and I swung past the gallery while they were hanging canvases. I showed them my picture and they loved it, and said I could be part of the show – if I could get it framed by the next morning! It was my first exhibition, and the painting sold within five minutes."

PICTURE PERFECT

Over the next few years Angelique evolved her artwork in her spare time, but kept her full-time studio job. Today, she only tattoos for two days

a week at Rob Admiraal Tattoo Studio and devotes most of her time to her artwork.

Spending most of her week on painting has also given Angelique time to research the roots of old

5 'Cornelia'

6 An 'octopussy pirate' and other pretty pin-ups

"MOST TATTOOISTS IN THE 1900s **USED WATERCOLOURS TO CREATE FLASH**"

school tattoos. "Tattoo artists in the 1940s and 50s took inspiration from contemporary images such as magazine illustrations, photos of Hollywood stars and so on," she says. "So I started searching for images that provided ideas for artists over 70 years ago. Now I spend a lot of time in markets and antique shops looking for stuff."

OLD SCHOOL TATTOO GALLERY

TATTOOIST Jarosław Rzymiski at Rock'n'Roll Tattoo, Edinburgh, Scotland

COLLECTOR Monika Kaczala, Edinburgh: "I just decided to get the girl because I liked it! Next I'd like to get some roses inked on my chest."





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TATTOOIST Tobi (Good Karma) at Penetration Inc, Vienna, Austria

COLLECTOR Maureen Van Mortis, Los Angeles, USA: "I went through a difficult break-up when I was 19, and got this chest piece to start anew."

TATTOOIST Keith Sherratt at Signature Tattoo Studios, Lichfield

COLLECTOR Shereen Carson, Grimsby: "The clock will have the number eight on it to represent my birthday and that of my late grandad. The kitties are similar to figurines I carry around for luck."



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TATTOOIST Jon B at Narcissism, Rayleigh, Essex

COLLECTOR Martin Laffey, Basildon, Essex: "I gave Jon an initial idea for a design that was black and grey, and gave him free reign with regards to colour."

TATTOOIST Dave Horspool at Concept Body Art, Stamford, Lincolnshire

COLLECTOR Tanya Buxton, Belper, Derbyshire: "I'm a tattooist, and Sailor Jerry is a big inspiration for me."



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TATTOOIST Simon Erl at Jayne Doe Tattoo, Essex

COLLECTOR David Vaughan, Manchester: "All my tattoos are traditional, and I like them because they match my personality."



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TATTOOIST Jeff Tarinelli at Oddball, Portland, Oregon, USA, and Eli Falconett at Adorn, Beaverton, Oregon, USA

COLLECTOR Lydia Fatale, Portland: "I was getting my arm tattooed when the Ramones' version of 'Needles And Pins' came on the radio. I was going through heartbreak, and the song hit home."

TATTOOIST Graham Barber at Dermagraphica, Leominster, Herefordshire

COLLECTOR Jack Griff, Birmingham: "I saw people with this design, liked it, and decided to go for it."

TATTOOIST Jo Harrison at Modern Body Art, Birmingham

COLLECTOR Kandy K, Phoenix, Arizona, USA: "I got my back inked as a tribute to my mum, who died from heart disease. The Stargazer lily was her favourite flower."



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UNCLE ALLAN

THE GREAT DANE WHO'S WILD
ABOUT TATTOOING WILDLIFE



Animals are my favourite subjects and I have a strange fascination with slapping horns and antlers where they don't belong, such as on girls' heads..." admits Uncle Allan. "If I draw a semi-naked girl in lingerie, then it's nothing more. But when I give her a pair of horns she becomes more like a mythical creature."

The Danish inker has become so well-known for his wildlife work and horny details that people are queuing up to go under his needles. "I still can't believe how long our waiting list is!" enthuses Allan. "We're trying to reduce it so that we don't have to plan our holidays three years in advance. I'm honoured that people want to get tattooed by me and are willing to wait that long, but I do miss painting and spontaneous tattooing. It's been crazy and I don't know how it happened!"





KID ROCK

Like most tattooists, Allan has been drawing since he was a child, but it was the likes of Axl Rose and his cock-rocking cronies who sparked his interest in body art. "I was around 10 years old when I started

"WHEN I TATTOO A PAIR OF HORNS ON A GIRL, SHE BECOMES MORE MYTHICAL"

listening to their music, and I perfected drawing their tattoos," Allan recalls. "Because I listened to hard rock and metal, I became exposed to tons of tattoos and tattoo-related artwork, so my taste in music got me hooked on drawing ink. I used to give my schoolmates GN'R tats using a marker pen."

Discouraged by the belief that all tattoo artists had to look like one of the Hells Angels, Allan turned to graffiti to experiment with his art. But he changed his mind when he walked into his local tattoo studio to get some ink that he'd designed, and saw that none of the folk in the shop were heavy-set, bearded dudes, dressed head-to-foot in leather.

"The place was selling records, posters and skateboards," says Allan. "I went in with a book of my art and, after looking through it, the tattooist



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asked me if I wanted to become his apprentice, right there on the spot."

But his dream was quickly shattered by the reality of being a rookie tattooist, as Allan's boss put him through his paces. "He was from Canada, and he learned tattooing the old-school way, where you're nothing as long as you're an apprentice," says Allan. "I got all the lame, boring jobs for a long time before I had a tattoo machine in my hands, but I understand that he was making sure that I was serious. And I really was."

Even though Allan worked his way up from the bottom, he isn't bitter about the increasing influx of tattooists who have bought a ready-to-go kit on the internet and set up shop the easy way. But he isn't keen on tattooists who don't put their customers

- 1 A fox design, with Satanic imagery
- 2 Allan tattoos at Conspiracy Inc, as goat skulls look on
- 3 A satanic wolf
- 4 This owl has special Uncle Allan horns



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first. "I'm not saying that you need to go through a rough apprenticeship to earn the right to tattoo, but it doesn't hurt to show a bit of respect for the trade, and the people who you'll mark for life," he explains.

"I GET MANY REQUESTS FOR ANTLERS. KEEP THEM COMING, PEOPLE!"

HORN OF PLENTY

Now Allan works out of his studio, Conspiracy Inc., in Copenhagen. Priding himself on only tattooing *his* designs, Allan has built up a reputation as a respectful artist who fuses traditional and realistic styles, and, of course, his wildlife and antler tattoos. "I could go on and on analysing why I like putting

horns on stuff, but I don't want to ruin it for those who just want me to draw it because it looks cool," explains Allan. "I get many requests for that stuff, and that's fine with me. Keep it coming, people!"

However, Allan has strict no-go areas when it comes to custom designs. "I don't tattoo anything racist," he says firmly. "I don't believe in God or Satan, but I don't mind doing religious or Satanic tats. People mostly get them for fun, anyway."

Allan's strangest request was someone who asked if he could make "more integrity in the society machine". Allan laughs, "I had to tell him I didn't know how to draw that."

Despite the recognition Allan's received, Conspiracy Inc. is located on an inconspicuous street, and you could easily walk past it without noticing. "We don't mind being hard to find, because we aren't a street shop and we do our own thing," says Allan. "People who need to find us will find us."

- 5 A vibrant ram skull back piece
- 6 A horned lady
- 7 A fearsome coyote



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ANIMALS GALLERY



TATTOOIST Martin Couley at Couley's Tattoo Studio, Newcastle

COLLECTOR Jason Goddard, Selby, North Yorkshire: "I keep tropical finches."

TATTOOIST Chad Stone at Hart & Huntington, Orlando, USA

COLLECTOR Dan Hale, Marlborough, Wiltshire: "This is one of Shad's designs."



TATTOOIST Valerie Vargas at Frith Street Tattoo, London

COLLECTOR Bruno, London: "I think the owl is mysterious."

TATTOOIST Mat Lapping at Creative Vandals, Hull

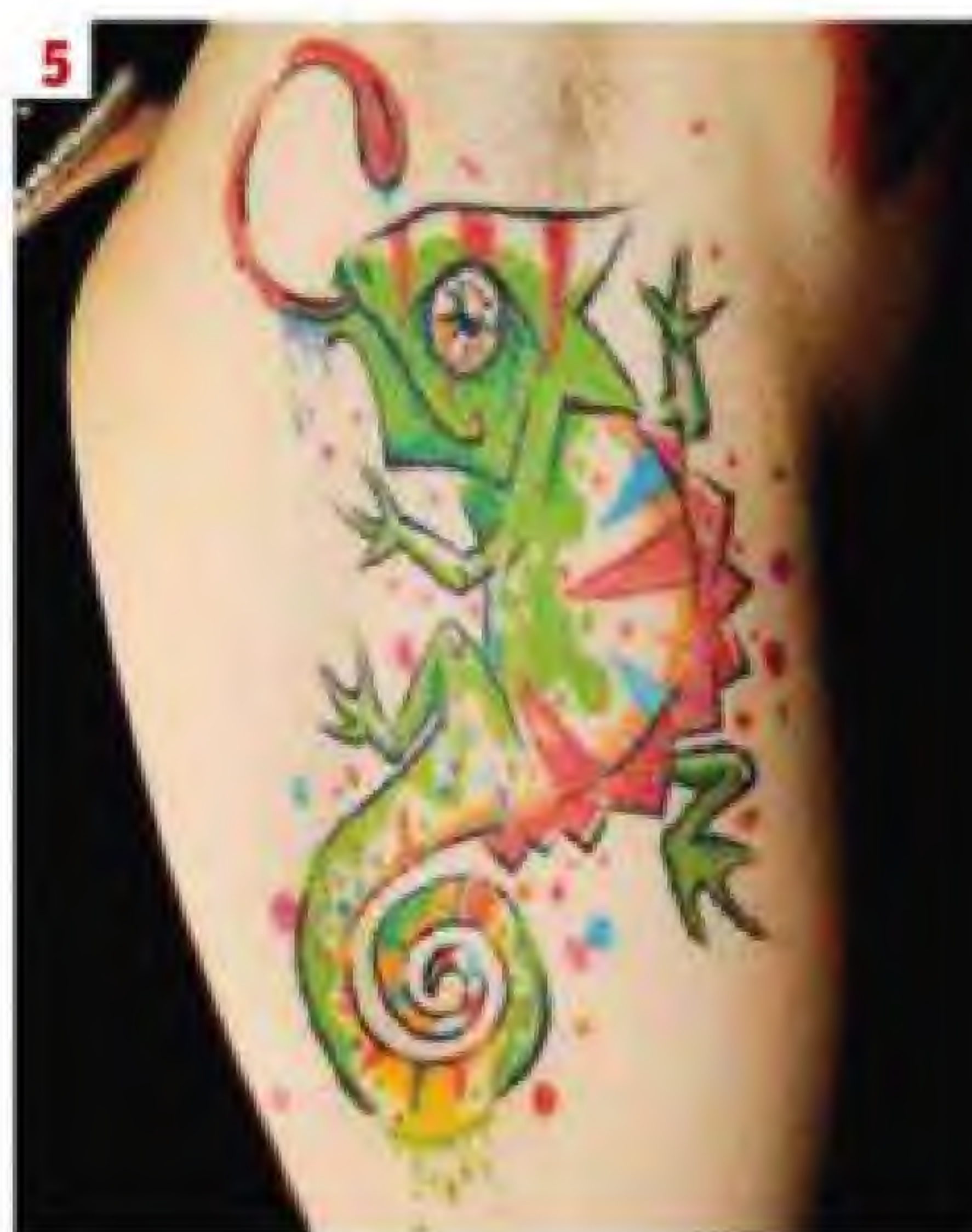
COLLECTOR John Anderton, County Durham: "Mat wanted to ink this, and I volunteered."

TATTOOIST Aleksandras Astrauskas at Giahi Tattoo, Zurich, Switzerland

COLLECTOR Sebastian Eletic, Switzerland: "I like animal documentaries about chameleons."

TATTOOIST Scott Laidlaw at Slawit Ink, Slawit, Huddersfield

COLLECTOR Jo Laidlow, Slawit: "My maiden name is Fish."



TATTOOIST

Jason Kundell
at Art Work
Rebels, Portland,
Oregon, USA

COLLECTOR Jesse
Lee Denning, New
York, USA: "This
is a Kitsune, which
is a Japanese
mythological fox."

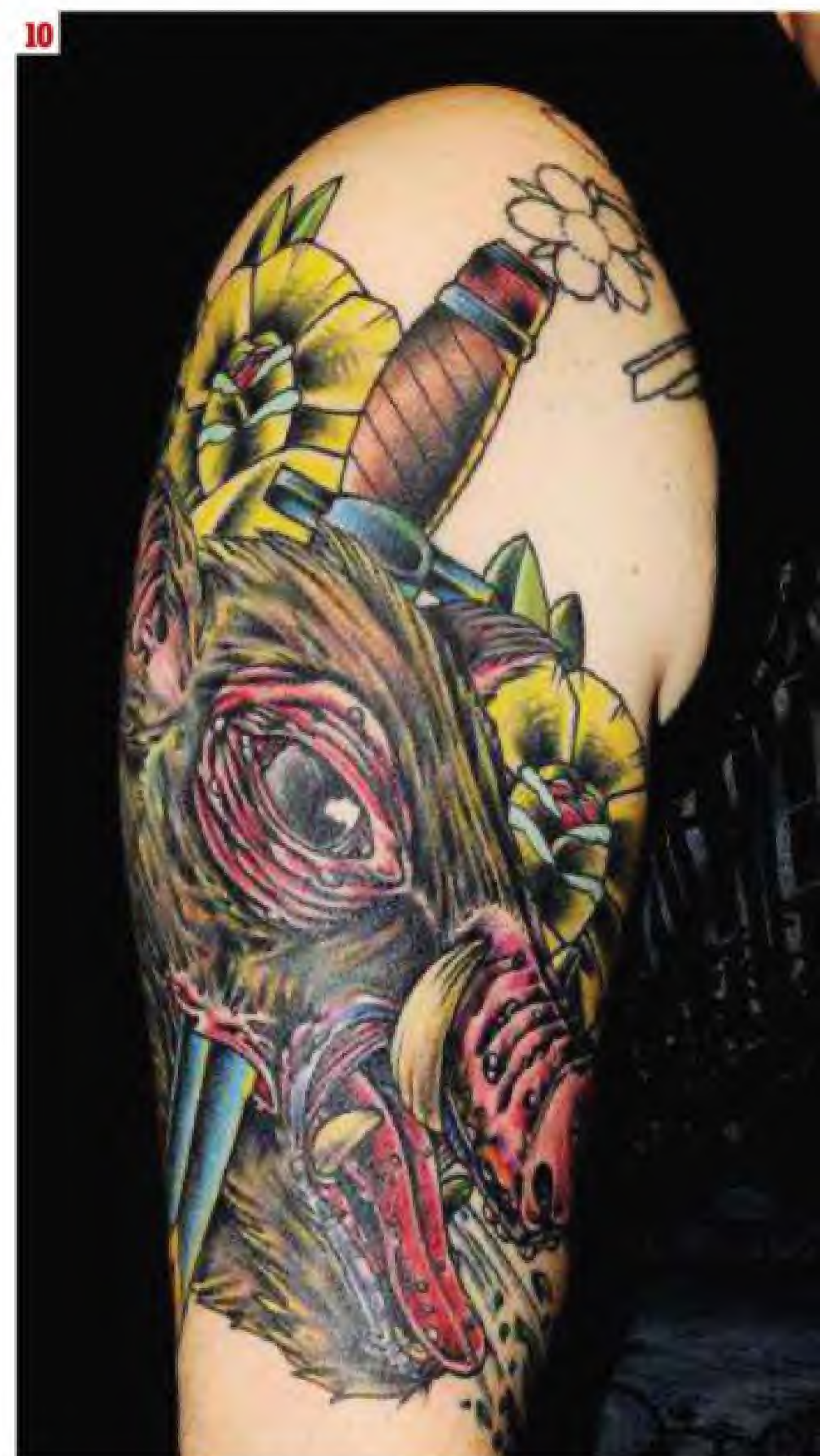




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TATTOOIST Jacob Pedersen at Evil Twins Heavenly Tattoo Studio, Helsingborg, Sweden

COLLECTOR Jane Mosley, North Wales: "Jacob's original sketch caught my eye."

TATTOOIST Chris 51 at Area 51 Tattoo, Springfield, Oregon, USA

COLLECTOR Elizabeth Hunt, Newark: "I love everything to do with pirates."

TATTOOIST Lee Denham at Sacred Skin, Doncaster

COLLECTOR Craig Magee, Doncaster: "It's a hogshead with a dagger through it, and I've never seen anyone with a similar piece."

TATTOOIST Tanane Whitfield at Studio Evolve Tattoo, Virginia Beach, Virginia, USA

COLLECTOR Chris Harrison, Bridgend, Wales: "I wanted this Tyrannosaurus Rex with a monocle because I like dinosaurs."

TATTOOIST Rob Cartwright at Rob's Tattoo Studio, Brierley Hill, West Midlands

COLLECTOR Stephen Potter, Kingswinford, West Midlands: "I love the way tigers look, and they represent strength."

12



BLACK AND GREY ICON

JASON BUTCHER

THE DARK DEVIL WHO SEES
LIFE IN MONOCHROME



“Once I went to a convention and decided not to take coloured inks with me – I’d rather not have done anything during the convention than ink a colour tattoo,” recalls Jason Butcher. “Other artists were outraged, saying, ‘Are you serious? Who the fuck do you think you are?’ It’s fairly standard to specialise these days, but back then it didn’t happen – especially in the UK.”

Jason Butcher may live his life in black and grey, but he’s a bright spark. He’s left his dark marks on countless ink-lovers – including Maxim from The Prodigy – and after 17 years in the game it’s remarkable that his passion for skin art hasn’t dwindled. He still attends conventions with the excitement of a newbie and he’s always looking for ways to improve his skill and technique.

BLACK AND GREY ICON



StoreMags.com

"I think I'm more enthusiastic about inking now than I've ever been. I love it," he grins. "Recently I counted how much tattooing I'd done in my life and realised it was 16,000 hours. That's ridiculous!"

"MY STYLE IS **DRIVEN BY EMOTION**, SO **BLACK AND GREY** IS SUITABLY **MOODY**"

- 1 This tattoo represents a fear of time passing
- 2 A scary hand
- 3 Three faces in one

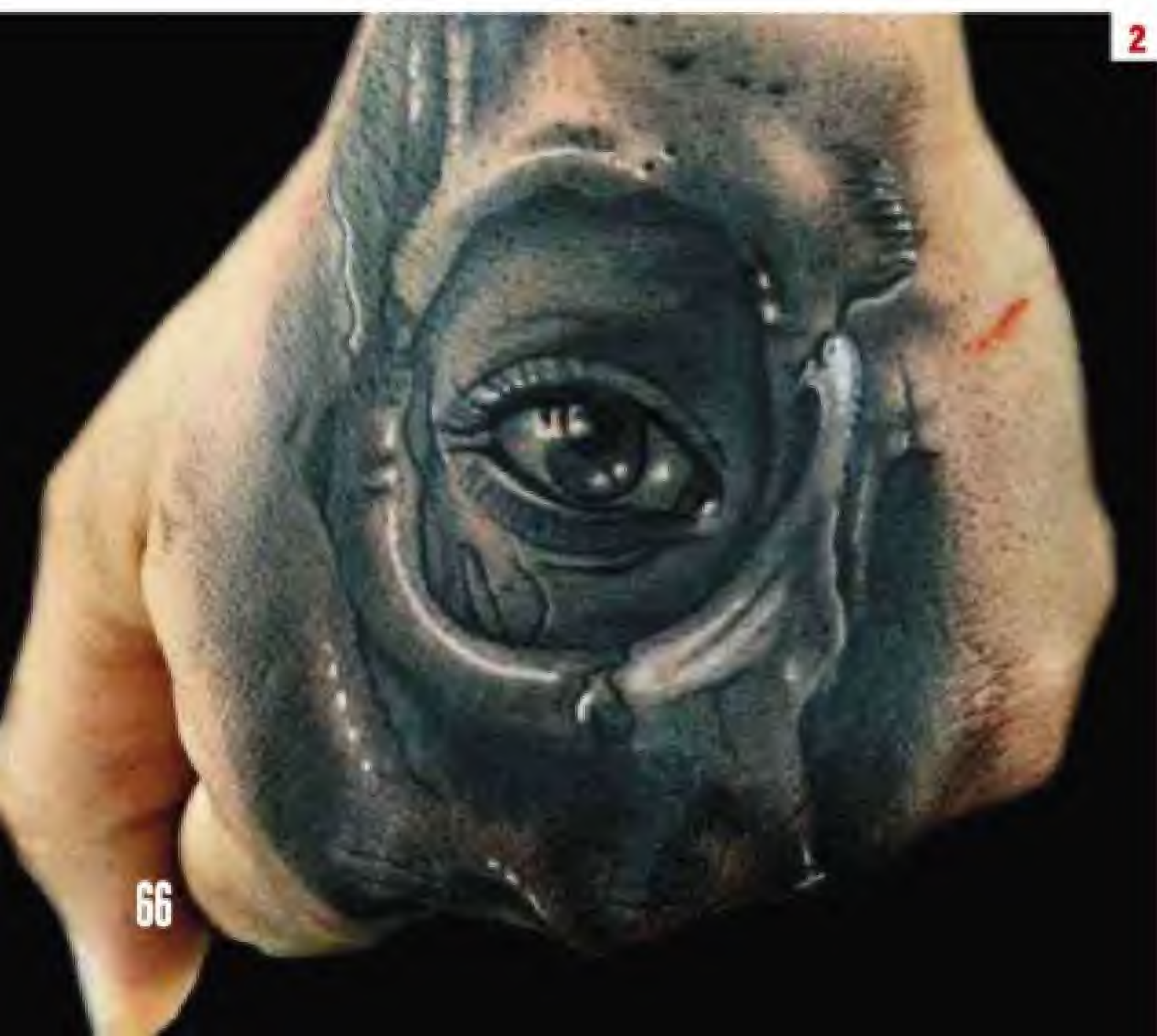
GREY AREAS

That's almost two full years of Jason's 41 years on this planet or, for those who are more satanically minded, 666 days. That's even more remarkable given that Jason is entirely self-taught. "I fancied tattooing when I was 18 years old, but life has a habit of doing what it wants with you," he says.

"So I got married, had kids, and didn't have anything to do with the industry. But my sister showed me a tattoo magazine, and what I saw blew me away – it reignited my urge to do it. So I approached a few studios for an apprenticeship. They all blew me off, but one guy was kind enough to sell me some equipment, and the rest is history."

Using his trusting friends to practice on, Jason picked up a needle without any guidance. "I didn't lie to them," he laughs. "I'd tell them, 'I'm not good at this, but I'll be amazing some day'. And they'd say, 'That's fine, as long as you realise that you're shit now!' It was a steeper learning curve than an apprenticeship, but liberating. There were no limits, and I was free to try whatever I wanted."

Jason admits that the first two or three years were tough, but his confidence gradually grew. "People were complimentary about my work and I realised that I might actually be pretty good,"





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he says. "When I started working in a studio for a short while, I realised that I was better than all of the other guys in the shop. It was a great boost, because for six or seven years after starting, I thought I'd be found out for not knowing what I was doing. Even these days I think, 'I got away with it, again!'"

BACK TO BLACK

During these formative years Jason developed his signature black and grey style. "It happened because I drew mostly in pencil," he says. "My style is also driven by emotion, so black and grey is suitably moody and dark. I did ink in colour as well, because everyone was trying to be an all-rounder in those days, but I wasn't interested."

The artist brought that single-mindedness to Immortal Ink – the shop he opened in 1999 in Chelmsford, Essex, and still works from – and admits he's "super picky" about the work he takes



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on. "If I don't love an idea I don't want to do it," he insists. "We have five other good tattooists here, so generally clients aren't too fussed. Our customers are cool, and they understand how we do things. If someone wants a tattoo from me, the best thing for them to do is give me a theme – such as a song lyric or phrase – so that I come up with a creative idea."

RED, WHITE AND BOO

That approach leads to one of Jason's favourite kind of jobs – portraiture including his zombieified art – where people such as Elvis, Marilyn Monroe and Chuck Berry get delightfully gory makeovers. "The zombies started because a friend of mine had a rock'n'roll star tattooed on one arm, and he thought of doing a dead version," Jason laughs. "So it wasn't my idea, in fairness. But it's become popular, and it's funny to think of people walking around with zombie celebrities on their arms."

4 Another tattoo in Jason's 'death romantic' style, tattooed on a client named Ryan in Detroit

5 Jason says this painting looks "scarily like" his 11-year-old niece



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Some folk want Jason to zombify their family, too. "Recently, a girl who wanted me to ink a zombie portrait of her mum came into the shop," Jason chuckles. "Her mum was really cool and

"IT'S FUNNY TO THINK OF PEOPLE WITH ZOMBIE CELEBRITIES ON THEIR ARMS"

she loved the finished work. "I'm not sure my mum would have loved it!"

SHADOW OF DEATH

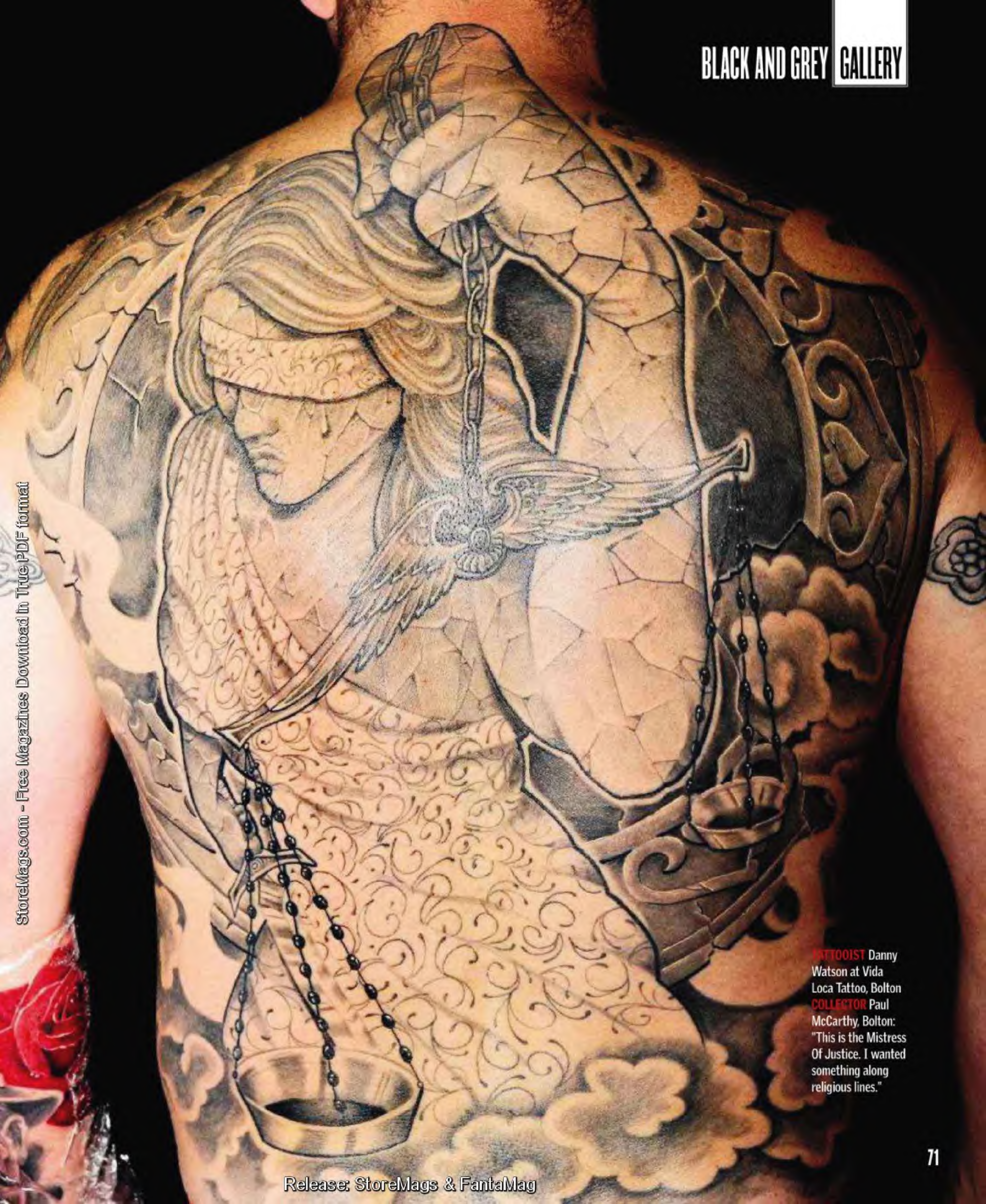
Fittingly for a Butcher, Jason's art often features grotesque imagery, such as dying, decaying beauties. He didn't know where this twisted streak came from,

or what it meant, until a chance meeting a few years ago. "A girl in the USA explained it to me," he confides. "She wanted a tattoo of women dying, and told me that she wanted me to do it because the women I ink are beautiful and at peace. I realised that most of my art is about coming to terms with mortality, and being at ease with life and death. I hadn't even realised that until then."

Light and dark, grey and black, and good and evil feature in the artist's work. But despite Jason's darkness, he's still hopelessly in love with tattooing. And his love is strange and brutal. "I remember having a conversation with a guy who wanted a tattoo on his stomach," Jason recalls. "He wanted it to look ripped open so that you could see guts, and we were having a serious debate over whether something should be bursting out... I stopped myself and thought, 'What the fuck am I talking about?' My life is fucking strange, but it's brilliant."

6 A selection of bearded zombies on client Kev, and a skull on his ribs





TATTOOIST Danny Watson at Vida Loca Tattoo, Bolton
COLLECTOR Paul McCarthy, Bolton:
"This is the Mistress Of Justice. I wanted something along religious lines."

TATTOOIST Volker at Buena Vista Tattoo Club, Würzburg, Germany

COLLECTOR Dirk Lange, Munich, Germany: "I wanted to get a tattoo from Volker, because he has a distinctive style."

TATTOOIST Anabi at Anabi Tattoo, Rayskiego, Szczecin, Poland

COLLECTOR Gregory Krupinski, Poland: "This is part of a theatrical sleeve. The girl isn't anyone in particular, and my tattooist had the idea for the Venetian mask."

TATTOOIST Matt at Self Sacrifice, London

COLLECTOR Caroline Panico, Winchester: "This is a Sherlock Holmes quote, and I've loved it for years and years."



TATTOOIST 75 artists
COLLECTOR Matt Gone, Portland,
Oregon, USA: "I love the mathematical
pattern of my chequerboard. Its symmetry
makes up for my asymmetry."

PORTRAITS ICON

MIKE DEVRIES

THE VISAGE VIRTUOSO AND TATTOOIST TO THE STARS



When Sly Stallone asked Mike DeVries to cover his upper arm and shoulder with a colour portrait of his beloved wife, Jennifer Flavin, the inker didn't realise what he'd let himself in for.

"Sly was a pretty difficult customer," admits Mike. "He'd never been tattooed before, or even stepped inside a tattoo shop, but he was picky about what he wanted. I'm pretty stubborn as well, because I don't want to ink something stupid, so we were constantly head-butting on ideas. But we did end up laughing about it. When I'd finished, he told me that if I wasn't such a good tattooist, he would have knocked me out, and I told him that he was my worst client ever."

Inking the muscleman is a highlight of Mike's career, which began at the tender age of 16. "I often







get asked when I started my tattoo apprenticeship,” says Mike. “It began when I got my first piece. My buddy got a tattoo of a moon with an evil face, and the next day I got a little red sun with an evil face on my upper shoulder blade. It was on a whim, but I thought it was the coolest thing ever. After that, I was pretty much getting tattooed every week.”

BUILDING THE FUTURE

The underage Mike was getting inked illegally by a local artist who ran a tats-on-wheels service, but at age 18, he started regularly visiting a tattoo shop in his home town of Northridge, California. He gradually accumulated an impressive array of larger pieces, including a Japanese koi with an octopus on one arm, some biomechanical art, and a tree on his leg. Yet despite his growing collection, Mike hadn’t seriously considered learning the trade. After graduating from high school, he went to work

full-time with his dad as a construction worker, until a golden opportunity fell into his lap six years later.

“Even when I was in my mid-to-late teens, I was paying close attention to the entire tattooing process.

1 Bob Marley, Salvador Dalí, Sinéad O’Connor, Jack Black and Jesus

“I TOLD SYLVESTER STALLONE THAT HE WAS MY WORST CLIENT EVER”

I loved art from a young age – my parents bought a lot of it, and I liked to draw all the time – so I enjoyed watching how tattooists worked,” Mike says. “In 2003, I was getting tattooed, and the artist offered my cousin an apprenticeship. Luckily for me, he didn’t have any interest and turned it down. I immediately said, ‘I’ll do it!’”

2 Brad Pitt as Lt. Aldo Raine in *Inglorious Basterds*
3 Doc Brown, from *Back To The Future*



The tattooist in question was Jim Hayack. Based in the small Californian suburb of Newbury Park, and working from a private studio in his house, Jim was a veteran inker with a bold and bright new school style.

"Mine was not a typical apprenticeship because I more or less paid Jim to teach me," explains Mike. "He didn't need anyone to scrub the floors and make coffee. I just worked on his house and he helped me to apply my artistic skills and love of portraits to tattooing. My first tattoo was a marijuana joint with a funny little face on it. That early stuff wasn't so great, but I kept getting better."

Amazingly, Mike only tattooed under Jim's supervision for two months before he bought a kit and started to work from his own private garage studio, which he built using his construction knowledge. Mike swiftly improved, and the same customers kept returning for more needle time.



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Setting up a website opened his work to a whole new audience, and people loved it.

DRAWING THE CROWDS

Now, Mike has his own shop – MD Tattoo Studio, in Northridge – and a constant stream of clients. When Mike's not tattooing, he attends as many art classes as he can and is constantly improving his techniques and learning new ones. An avid admirer of MC Escher, Salvador Dalí (see right) and, more recently, American artist Michael Godard, Mike is inspired to “keep up on the game, whether it's taking classes, reading books or attending seminars”.

And Mike likes to pass his knowledge on to fellow inkers. He's written educational books describing how he achieves his tattooing style, and he's released DVDs – one of which shows tattooists how to hone Photoshop techniques to improve custom work. He's now working on a book called *Tattoo Extremities*,

featuring ink on heads, hands and feet, and *Animal Ink*, which is dedicated to amazing animal portraits.

Mike says tattooing portraits is a big business, with punters asking for anything from a mirror image

4 Metallica's James Hetfield and other charismatic musicians get the DeVries treatment

“I LOVED ART FROM A YOUNG AGE AND I LIKED TO DRAW ALL THE TIME”

of a famous Hollywood star to the family pit bull. But the hardest celebrity portrait he's done to date was hard-man Robert De Niro. “I stencilled in an entire picture, and it just didn't look like him, and then I stencilled in another picture, and that didn't look like him either,” laughs Mike. “It's quite possible he was intimidating me from the page.”

5 Late American racing driver Dale Earnhardt



PORTRAITS GALLERY



TATTOOIST Mark Bailey at Golden Dragon Tattoo Studio, Chester

COLLECTOR Emma Bailey, Chester: "This is a portrait of my husband, Mark, next to a random painting. They work together."

TATTOOIST Mark Bailey at Golden Dragon Tattoo Studio, Chester

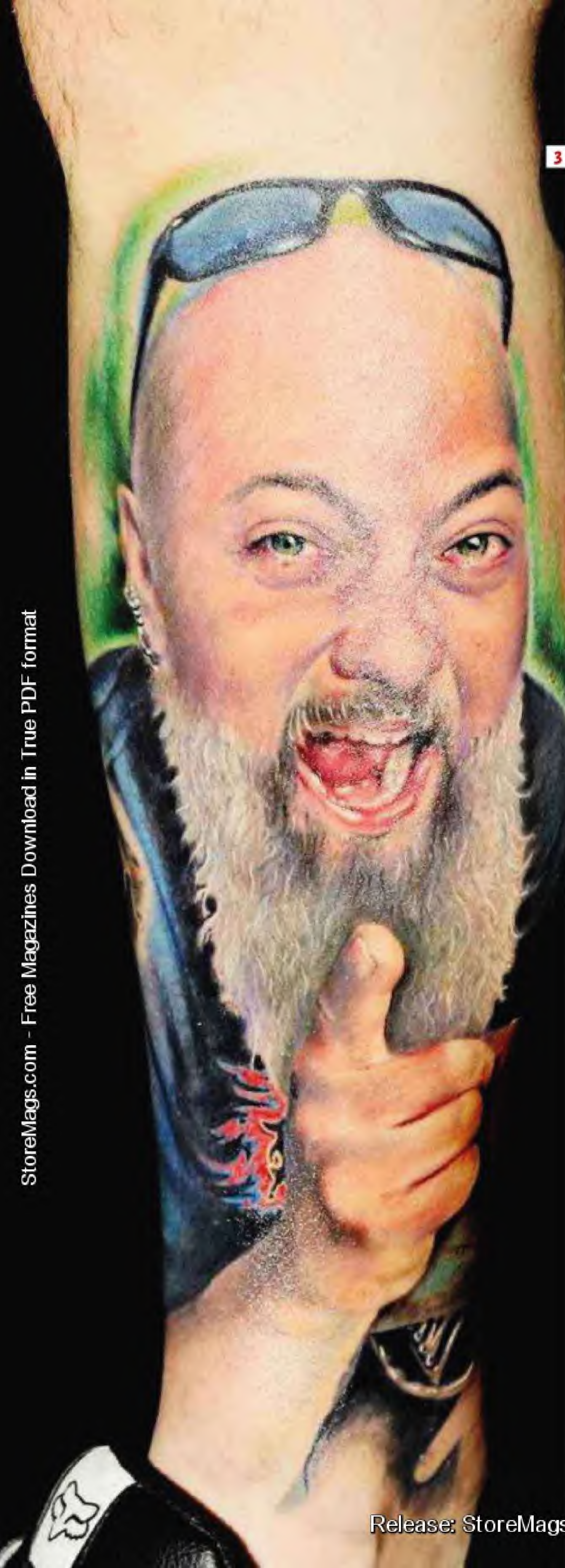
COLLECTOR Michelle Williams, Anglesey, Wales: "This is Johnny Depp in *Fear And Loathing In Las Vegas*. I think it's a really funny film."

TATTOOIST Liz Cook, Dallas, Texas, USA

COLLECTOR Cookie, Dallas: "My friend Mike is a washed-up rock'n'roller, and this is his face!"

TATTOOIST Lucky at Lucky Tattoo, Tychy, Silesia, Poland

COLLECTOR Dominic Pekuta, Tychy: "My friend took a photograph of my face, and my boss inked it on me."





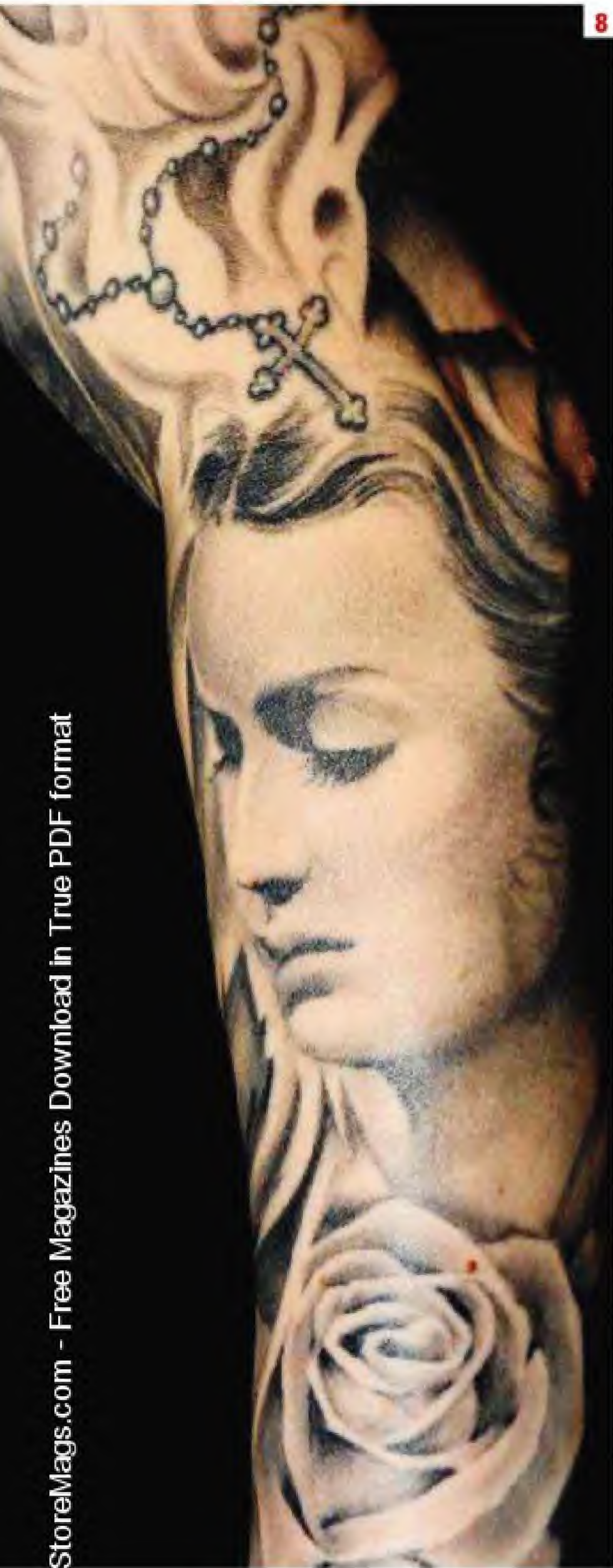
TATTOOIST Richard Guy at Tattoo Central, Catterick Garrison, North Yorkshire
COLLECTOR Mark Jeffery, Catterick Garrison: "I'm a horror movie fanatic, so this tattoo includes Leatherface from *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, Regan from *The Exorcist*, and the original Frankenstein's monster."



TATTOOIST Tony Evans at Opulent Ink, Wolverhampton
COLLECTOR Emma Bundonis, Wolverhampton: "I love music-based tattoos, and as well as this Jimi Hendrix piece I have a portrait of Lil Wayne and some Led Zeppelin lyrics."



TATTOOIST Alex Kelly at Bolton Tat Shop, Bolton
COLLECTOR Martin Hopkins, Heywood, Rochdale: "I've been listening to Bob Marley since I was two years old, so I thought I'd get him tattooed on my back!"



8

TATTOOIST Paul Naylor at Powerhouse Tattoos, Northwich, Cheshire
COLLECTOR Michelle Williams, Anglesey, Wales: "I told Paul I wanted pin-ups and roses, and I let him pick the designs."



9

TATTOOIST Ren at Skin Creation, Cardiff, Wales
COLLECTOR Michael Thomas, The Valleys, Wales: "Ren was airbrushing bikes before, and made his name with this tattoo. Lemmy is my idol."



10

TATTOOIST Scott Mustapic at Ink Vs Steel, Leeds
COLLECTOR Kylie Mustapic, Leeds: "I liked the idea of having Carmen Miranda on my leg, because I love all things 1950s, so my husband Scott drew up this design."

ORIENTALICON

ROBERT ATKINSON

THE NEEDLE NINJA WHO INKS FASTER
THAN A SPEEDING BULLET



In the global inking community, Robert's well-known for his stunning Japanese work. But the Californian skin artist claims his style is best described as "Western-Oriental". "I'm not an American guy trying to imitate a Japanese artist," he says. "I'm just taking the imagery and doing my best to make it my own style."

Robert's signature bold, large-scale Oriental work means he's in constant demand, and it's not unusual for clients to skip halfway across the world to sit in his chair. He's been tattooing for 20 years and even created custom shoes for celebrities including Drew Barrymore and Tommy Lee. "Both Tommy and Drew opted for a lotus flower design, which is symbolic in Japanese culture," explains Robert. "I've also made





custom shoes for amazing tattooists such as Filip Leu – who has been working on my own back piece – and Horiyoshi III, who has a pair in his tattoo museum.”

“I’VE MADE CUSTOM SHOES FOR TOMMY LEE AND DREW BARRYMORE”

TATTOO SCHOOL

But Robert’s brilliant career had humble beginnings. Rejecting academia for sketching in schoolbooks and partying with friends, Robert admits he was never destined to ace his exams, and he found it hard to focus in class. “Life just seemed a lot more interesting,” he says. “Then suddenly, all my pals

Robert’s painterly style translates to his tattooing





2



were leaving to go to college, and I was still trying to find my way. I did all kinds of odd jobs; I worked for a construction firm, as a pest controller, and I waited tables and sprayed T-shirts at the local theme park. Then I saw some of Ed Hardy and Eddy Deutshe's work in a magazine. It blew me away, man."

In 1992, with no fear and no bills to pay, Robert packed up his \$400 (£245) tattoo machine that his friends had given him as a gift, and then hitchhiked between LA and Seattle, inking strangers he met along the way. "It was a pretty cool time," Robert remembers. "I went down to Eugene, Oregon, because I knew the Grateful Dead were going to be playing there. I stumbled on a porch where people were hanging out and partying, and the next thing I knew, I had a place to stay and a line of people wanting tats."

Content and carefree, Robert spent heady days casually tattooing abstract tribal, flower

and inoffensive hippy designs, but he didn't realise how easy he'd had it until he went to work at Royal Tattoo in Denmark in 1996. Dropped into a busy, inner city tattoo shop with Henning Jørgensen,

"I WAS USED TO DOING ONE OR TWO TATTS A DAY, NOT EIGHT PIECES OF INK"

who's considered one of the best inkers in Europe, Robert was told to bash out eight pieces of ink a day and the pressure was on. "I'd been used to doing one or two tattoos a day, or three hours work on a bigger piece," Robert explains. "I was like, 'Oh my God, why am I so scared to do a three-inch feather?' I got my licks there for sure."

2 Skulls feature in Robert's work, alongside traditional Japanese Hannya masks



If that seemed challenging, Robert's move to Henning's new shop in Hamberg, Germany, proved an even bigger shock. "We were based in the middle of the red-light district and it was totally bananas,"

"AT THE GERMAN SHOP, THERE WERE DRUNKEN SAILORS AND PUNK ROCKERS"

As well as producing colour pieces, Robert works in black and grey, and creates custom shoes

he laughs. "There were drunken sailors, hookers, junkies, and punk rockers ready to stomp our arses... It was like nothing I'd ever experienced before."

JAPANESE PLEASE

But the roots of Robert's signature Western-Oriental style of tattooing developed when he moved to

Holland in 1999, to work for Greg Orie at Dragon Tattoo in Eindhoven. Greg, who focuses on large semi-traditional Japanese tattoos, pushed Robert to hone his talent, and his tattooing skills flourished. After two years under Greg's tutelage, Robert felt homesick and ready to take his new inking abilities back to the States. He came away from his European experience with more than a new working attitude.

"I smuggled back 10 grand in my shoes!" Robert says. "I put five grand in each boot, so I could hide my cash from the Government. I had a pit stop in London before flying back to America, and I remember getting a fancy suit made and staying at the Strand Palace hotel for four nights. It was really expensive, but I didn't care. Then I booked a first class plane ticket home. Could I get away smuggling cash now? No! I'd never do it again, but it makes for a pretty cool story, huh?"



NON-STOP SHOP

Robert arrived back in LA in 2001, and he's now happily married with a couple of kids and settled at Dolorosa Tattoo in Studio City, Los Angeles, surrounded by younger, up-and-coming inkers. Robert proudly claims that, apart from the time he broke his hand, he hasn't put down his tattoo machine for more than 10 days. "That's pretty crazy," he admits. "I've been non-stop with it, and it's time for me to turn it down a notch."

His body seems to agree. Robert recently developed Bell's Palsy – a virus that causes facial paralysis and can be attributed to stress. "I wouldn't say I'm stepping out of the party scene," says Robert. "But I'm taking a rest as things got a little crazy. The paralysis has affected my eye, and I have to tape it shut to sleep. Now I'll be sober for a bit."

As for the future, Robert's still serious about tattooing, but wants to reign in his reputation as

the fastest tattooist around. "It's flattering, but it's not cool when someone's got expectations on how much I'm gonna get done in a day," he says. "I'm older now – I've got less to prove – so I'm slowing it down

"I'M OLDER NOW AND I'VE GOT LESS TO PROVE, SO I'M SLOWING DOWN"

a little to make sure I last, because tattooing is everything to me. My designs are classic and they won't go out of style, but I'm also not the tattooist for everyone, so I look to each new tattoo I do as my biggest challenge yet. Let's put it this way; after all these years, I've known when to hold them and I know when to fold them."

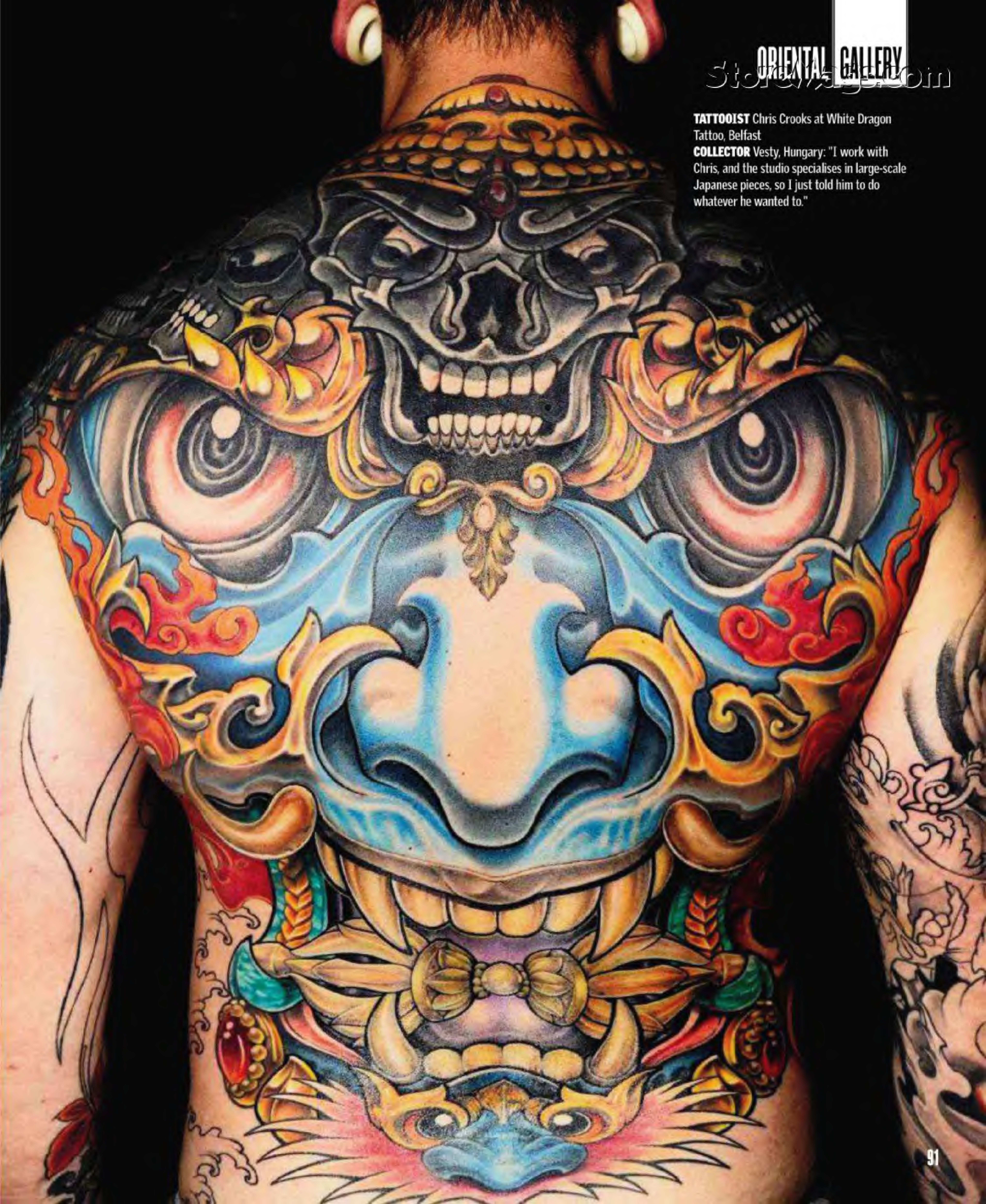
These large-scale pieces feature traditional Japanese imagery

ORIENTAL GALLERY



TATTOOIST Chris Crooks at White Dragon
Tattoo, Belfast

COLLECTOR Vesty, Hungary: "I work with
Chris, and the studio specialises in large-scale
Japanese pieces, so I just told him to do
whatever he wanted to."





1

TATTOOIST Tony Mancia at All Or Nothing Tattoo, Smyrna, Georgia, USA

COLLECTOR Joseph Herridge, Sheffield: "I gave the artist free reign to do this sleeve, which features a geisha and a wish egg - you make a wish on a one-eyed egg, then draw in the other eye when your wish has come true."

TATTOOIST Primal Art Tattoo, Doncaster

COLLECTOR Chris Mewse, Doncaster: "My girlfriend named the dragon Gorbash, after a character in *The Flight Of The Dragons*."

TATTOOIST Paul Naylor, Powerhouse Tattoo, Northwich, Cheshire

COLLECTOR Darren Perkins, Pontefract, West Yorkshire: "This is one Hannya mask of two, on my full sleeve."



2



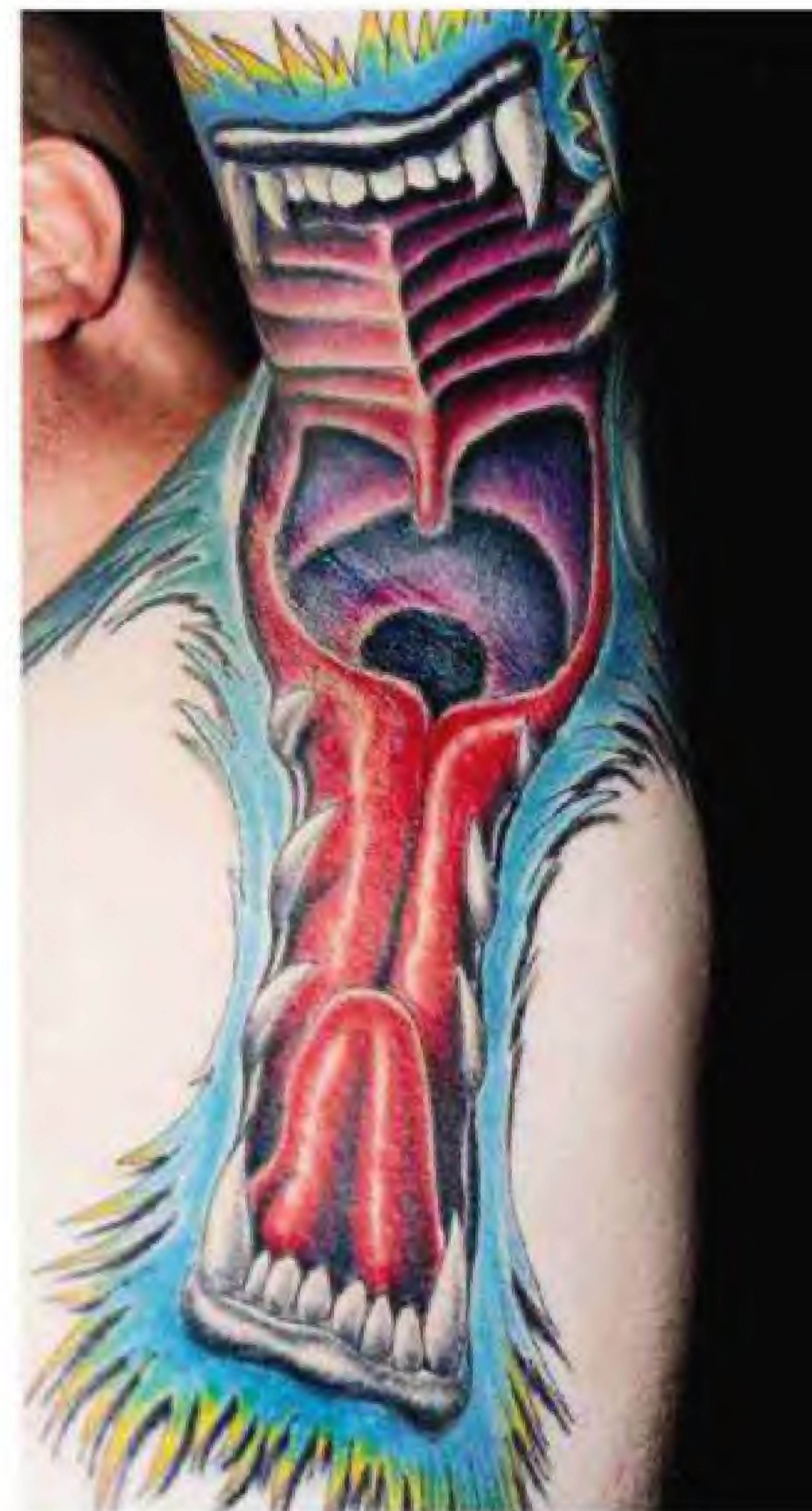
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4



TATTOOIST Steve Hartnoll, Tattooz, Birmingham
COLLECTOR Andrew Bamfield, Birmingham:
 "It took me 20 years to find someone to ink this dragon, because no-one knew how to do it – some people couldn't even understand what I wanted!"



5

TATTOOIST Paul Naylor, Powerhouse Tattoo, Northwich, Cheshire
COLLECTOR Darren Perkins, Pontefract, West Yorkshire:
 "I've always liked Hannya masks, and I added bright flowers to make the design pop out."
TATTOOIST Rob Ratcliffe at Border Rose Tattoo Studio, Rochdale
COLLECTOR Stuart Melville, Rochdale:
 "The bold colours in Oriental designs are perfect for covering up old tattoos."



6

BUGS

THE FRENCH REVOLUTIONARY WITH A CUBIST STYLE



Recognised as one of the most unique tattooists around, Bugs' abstract ink stands head and shoulders above other tattooing styles currently saturating the scene. His designs are a mixture of cubism, art deco and classical art, and look like they've been taken straight from a gallery wall and transferred to flesh. "My tattoos look like paintings because I paint a lot," Bugs explains. "I look at the colours I use on canvas, and try to recreate the effect on skin."

Bugs has just celebrated the 25th anniversary of Evil From The Needle, his tattoo studio in Camden, London, but he's now permanently based in Los Angeles. And after more than 30 years in the business, he enjoys a select and loyal clientele who travel from all over the world to go under his needles, or stalk him at conventions.



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COOL AND THE GANG

Born in Perpignan, France, Bugs grew up in a large council block where he hung out with local kids. When the older boys were bored they gave themselves crappy tattoos using three needles tied

“WHEN I WAS 13, I INKED A LITTLE CROSS WITH FOUR DOTS ON MY FOREARM”

together dipped in ink, and urged 13-year-old Bugs to do the same. "They teased me and said, 'If you wanna be part of the gang you need to prove yourself,'" he remembers. "I wanted to do all the exciting stuff they did, so I inked a little cross with four dots on my forearm. It meant something like 'The Bad Boys'. I hid it for many years because I was scared my mum would find out about it. One day, I stepped out of the shower and she saw it on my arm. She smacked me and shouted at me."

When Bugs went on summer trips to London in the early 1980s he stocked up on Dr Martens boots, jackets, T-shirts and punk records for himself and his skinhead pals. And he was bitten by the tattoo bug.

- 1** A unique take on a microphone
- 2** Bugs hard at work on an abstract sculpture
- 3** A client's arm gets Bugs' artistic touch

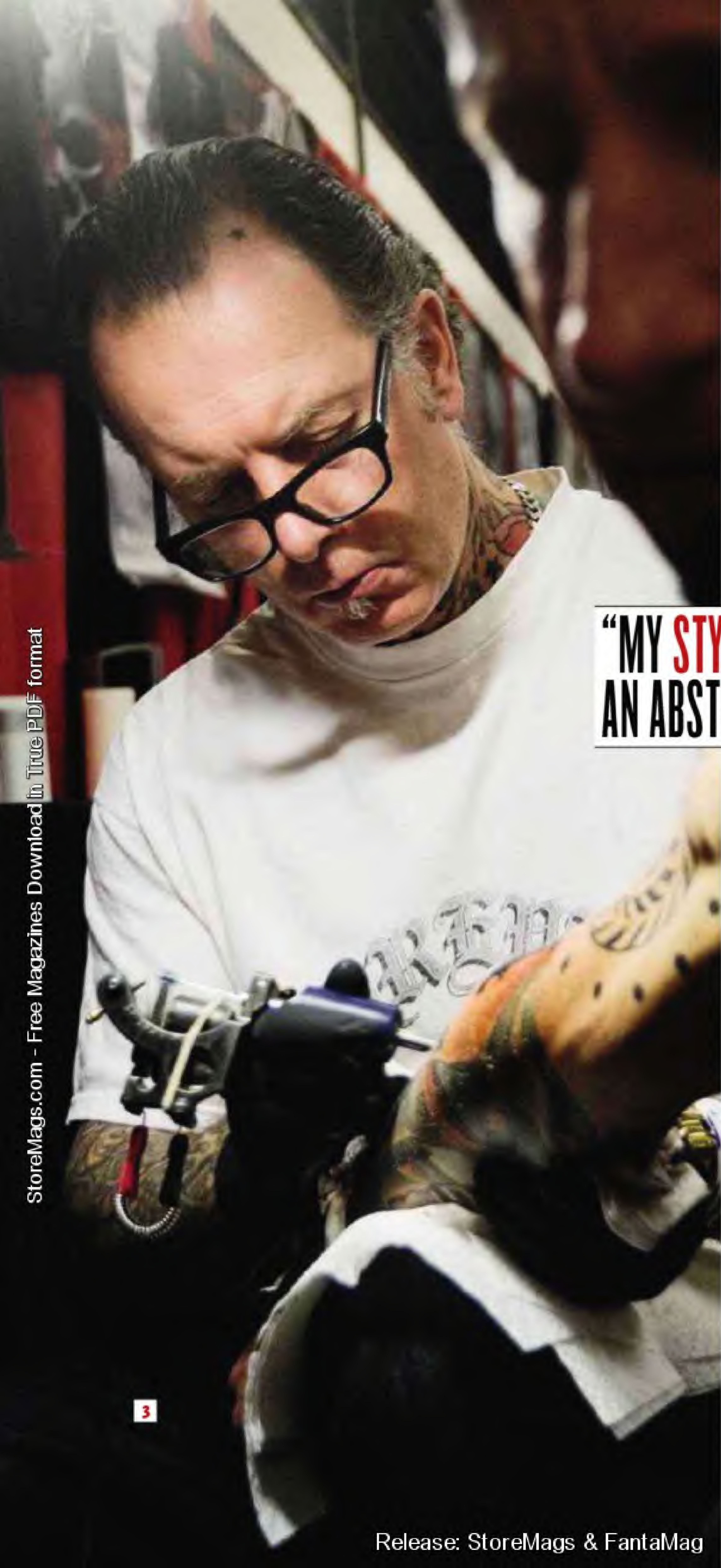


“Walking through Soho one day, I spotted a small sign saying ‘Tattoo’ over the entrance to a staircase,” Bugs remembers. “I was dying to get more ink, so I went into this dirty, dodgy-looking shop. The guys in there were like, ‘What the fuck do you want?’ I couldn’t speak English very well so I took a piece of paper and drew a pair of Doc Martens boots with the words ‘Bugs’ above them and ‘Skinhead’ beneath. Then I sat down, seven pounds changed hands, and it was all done pretty quickly. I bought a tattoo machine in London and returned to France to practice on friends.”

LONDON CALLING

Bugs attended a fine arts school for seven years with hopes of becoming a graphic artist, but he couldn't find work when he left. He fell back on his tattoo skills and moved to London in 1984, doing painting and decorating, along with two to three tattoos a week to pay the rent. Bugs went back to France in the summer of 1986 to work, and earned £500, so in October he finally settled in a basement in Camden.

However, an officer from the Department Of Health inspected the premises and closed it down because it wasn't clean, telling Bugs he could re-open after a week if he met the regulations. "We replaced the carpet with vinyl, painted the walls, added a sink and got a sterilisation unit," recalls Bugs. "At the time, everyone was talking about AIDs, and I didn't need any convincing to make sure I ran the studio by the book."



3

Bugs was ready to tattoo, but he didn't get a warm welcome from established London inkers. "I was walking into a really small tattoo scene compared to today, and I was French," says Bugs. "At that time, the Trafalgar Square punks used to beat up French tourists who were coming off the buses at Victoria station. They called it 'froggie bashing'. The other tattooists were saying, 'Who the fuck is this French arsehole coming here?' I felt threatened, but I'd come too far to give in."

Bugs' talent was evident from the start. His drawings were of a high quality ("my flash was well-presented compared with all the dirty-looking flash on the walls in other tattoo studios," he recalls) and his first clients thought he brought a bit of "French class" to the London tattoo scene. But the cubic style that he's known for now wasn't his forte

"MY **STYLE DEVELOPED** AFTER I TATTOOED AN ABSTRACT PORTRAIT OF MUSSOLINI"

– his bread and butter designs were tribal, black and grey and Japanese to begin with, then later Celtic. "That was how I made a name for myself. I only did custom work – large back and chest pieces or full sleeves – and I took custom to another level, landing the name 'King Of Celtic' in Europe," says Bugs. "I hit conventions in the US and people liked my work. Off the back of that, I became a well-known international artist."

BACK TO MODERNISM

But Bugs wasn't finished. His hunger to experiment with new styles was aided by a client who wanted a portrait of Mussolini. "I thought it was a heavy subject to tattoo, but forgetting the symbolism, the picture was an abstract, cubic painting by an Italian artist," Bugs recalls. "I thought it was cool, so we did it. Two months later, it featured in a tattoo magazine and that's how my style developed. It was like coming full circle after my stint at fine art school. I've always gravitated towards cubism."

People who want traditional tattoo designs – such as anchors, sacred hearts and daggers – still come through Bugs' doors, but his distinctive artistic skill attracts clients who like to dabble with unusual ideas. Recently he has been asked to ink a pair of scissors,



a cow, a kitchen knife, and a preying mantis devouring a wasp. Bugs is open-minded and likes a challenge – just as long as he approves of the subject matter. He's turned away a lot of people who want dog portraits, and a client who wanted a realistic piece detailing a dramatic incident.

"One guy had been trying to get an appointment with me for a while, and when we finally came to discuss his tattoo idea, he explained he'd been run over by a car, and wanted the events of the accident worked into a full sleeve theme," Bugs explains. "I declined. I can't do a tattoo I dislike, and some people try too hard to put a meaning into it that's hard to capture. I try to reach a compromise."

Bugs says the only famous portrait he's done is the 'Mona Lisa', but he'd like to try his hand at Marilyn Monroe, Elvis Presley, or Charlie Chaplin. He also likes Parisian-style still life pieces, and wants to ink a "big piece of Camembert with a knife".



CHASING THE GREEN FAIRY

It's no surprise to learn that when Bugs is away from the needles he hits the paintbrushes. And, like Van Gogh, who inspires him, Bugs knows the perils of absinthe. "It was the artists' drug of the time when Van Gogh was alive," Bugs says. "It became a way to create something. When I was young, my friends and I used to travel to Spain every weekend to party. We'd drink absinthe like beer because it was so cheap. Once, I had way too much and was as sick as a dog for a whole week. That was the last time I abused the green stuff, but I do have a growing collection of absinthe spoons I've found at flea markets, and I enjoy a glass around twice a year. I like the ritual of preparing the drink."

As well as surviving absinthe sickness, Bugs has survived a rapidly changing business and secured a reputation as the only tattooist who can expertly capture cubist designs on flesh. To up his

game, Bugs regularly experiments with painting on canvas and plays with colours and techniques, and sells his creations online. But he isn't sure what the future holds for the inking world. "There are too

4 A skeleton on fellow tattooist Kamil Mocet

5 Bugs loves inking and drinking wine

"I CAN'T DO A TATTOO I DISLIKE, SO I TRY AND REACH A COMPROMISE"

many tattooists in town now and inkers have to compete for clients," he says. "That's partly down to myself, and other tattooists. We didn't realise at the time, but we were opening the floodgates to new kids who see ink as cool and fashionable. We wanted to show tattoos differently in the media, and we succeeded, but there's been a price to pay."

6 A Japanese girl, which reminds Bugs of having fun in Japan

7 A Calla lily

8 A lightbulb

9 Men get to work on this chest piece

ART GALLERY



TATTOOIST Kamil Mocet at Kamil Tattoos, London

COLLECTOR Becky Priestly, Hitchin: "I love flowers, and I asked Kamil to make them as bright as he could."

TATTOOIST Richard at Eclipse Tattoo Studio, Camden, London

COLLECTOR Dom McEiben, Sydney, Australia: "This is the cover artwork of Within Temptation's fourth album, *The Heart Of Everything*. It's goth rock at its best."

2



TATTOOIST George Mavridis at Tattooligans, Thessaloniki, Greece

COLLECTOR Kostas Patrikis, Thessaloniki: "I have a tattoo of the Virgin Mary, because I believe in her. It took 55 hours."

TATTOOIST Marcin Ptak at InkDependent Tattoo, Edinburgh

COLLECTOR Chewitt Self, Edinburgh: "I wanted to capture a moment within the girl's face. I wish I knew her!"

TATTOOIST Claire at The Studio, Manchester

COLLECTOR Tori Bohlman, Manchester: "This is a design by Lyubov Popova, who was a Russian avant-garde artist."

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TATTOOIST Kosa at Art Line Tattoo, Rybnik, Poland

COLLECTOR Dariusz Kuczek, Poland: "This wooden guy represents me, and he's thinking about time that's passed."

TATTOOIST Mirek vel Stotker at Stotker Tattoo, Islington, London

COLLECTOR Ricki Nerreter, London: "This is based on Mark Ryden's piece, 'Puella Animo Aureo'. The girl holding the guitar is my sister, and I'm the one standing on a pile of books."

7



TATTOOIST Musa at Tribo Tattoo, Prague, Czech Republic

COLLECTOR Mark Christie, Bollington, Cheshire: "Most of my tattoos are Oriental, and this one is based on a picture of a Japanese crane."

TATTOOIST Noi Siamese 3 at 1969 Tattoo, Oslo, Norway

COLLECTOR Espen Orfjell, Oslo: "I love pin-up art, and this piece is based on the work of two different artists: the face is by Gil Elvgren, and the rest is by Jay Scott Pike."



HORRORICON

PAUL BOOTH

THE PRINCE OF DARKNESS WHO
FACES UP TO HIS DEMONS



When I find my old school notebooks they're covered in sketches of monsters and skulls," explains Paul Booth. "My upbringing was tough, psychologically, and it certainly fucked me up enough to make me draw those pictures..."

Paul's been tattooing for over 20 years, and his demonic black and grey designs are popular with metal royalty such as Slayer, Slipknot and Pantera. Rolling Stone magazine declared him "the new king of rock tattoo" and his Last Rites Tattoo Theatre base in New York is a successful art hangout for what he describes as his "dark family". Every great artist needs a muse, and Paul's is darkness. "There are demons driving my needles," he confides. "Rather than sitting on my arse it's better for me to battle demons. I need to feed that urge."



UNHAPPY CHILDHOOD

The 43-year-old from New Jersey, USA, has plenty of demons to wrestle with. He says he had a “weird, middle-class, neglected upbringing”, and he hates his father for being absent while his mother worked

“THE LIKENESS OF MY SIXTH GRADE TEACHER SHOWS UP IN MY DEMONS”

two jobs to keep the family going. By the time Paul hit his late teens he’d become a repo man who stole cars. “It was a bit of a death-wish lifestyle, and if I’d stayed in it I wouldn’t have seen 30,” he states.

However, Paul’s life changed at 18, when he became a father, and his first tattoo was his daughter’s name – Tabitha – with a rose, on his arm. “It was a typical Jersey Boy design, but I asked the artist to customise it so I wouldn’t end up sitting next to some guy in a bar, looking like an asshole because I had the same tattoo as him,” he says. After that ink initiation, Paul was hooked. “I was

intrigued by how the tattoo came together,” he says. “It blew my mind.”

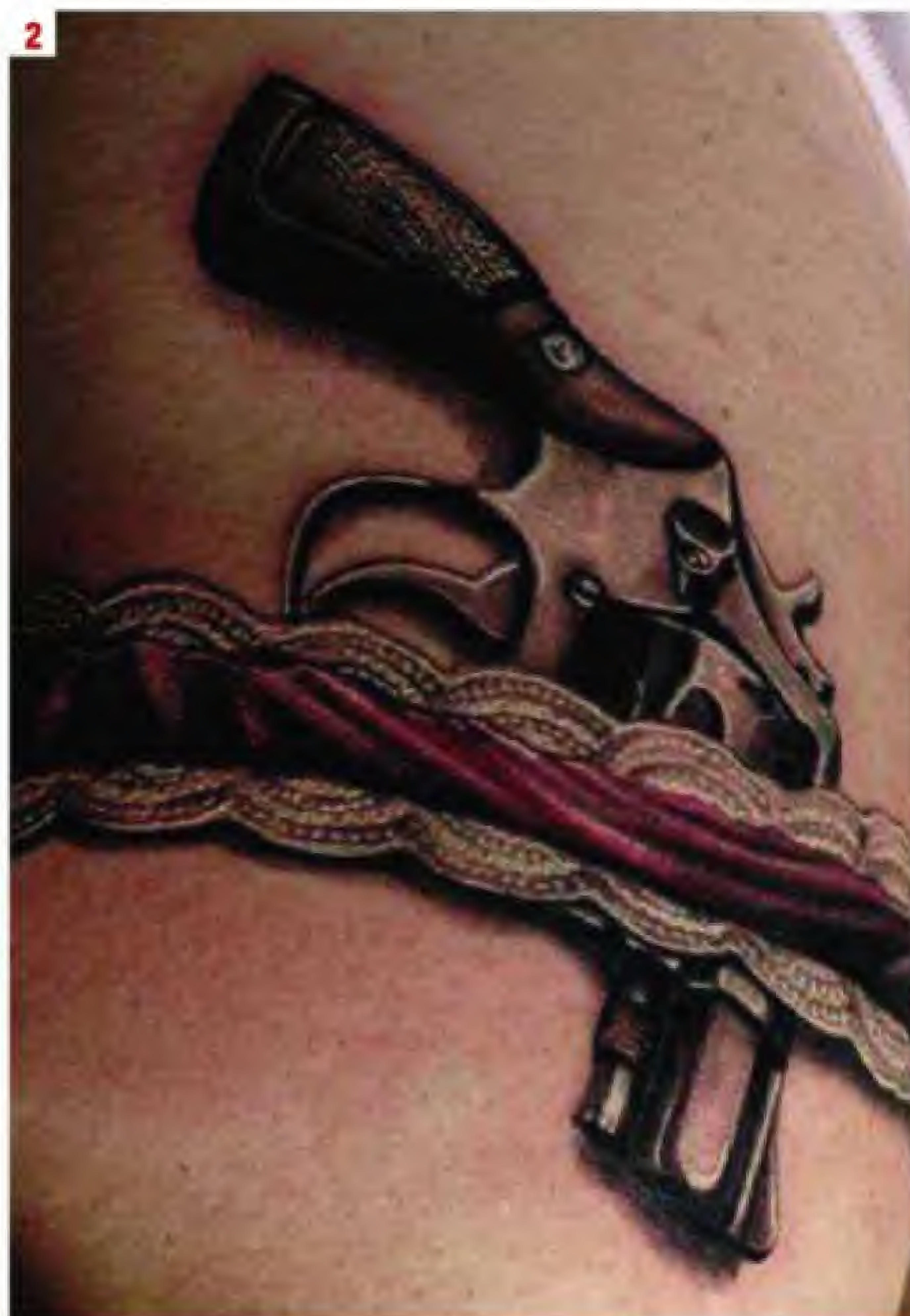
Paul began an apprenticeship at a shop called the Tattoo Factory, where he learned the ethics and traditions of inking, and developed his art. A year later, he lost his job after moving to California to live with his dying father. “He got in touch with me and, as much as I hated him, I went to see him,” Paul remembers. “I went because I had some shit to say to him rather than because I cared for him, but when I got there, I stayed. I said some things I needed to say, he said some things he needed to say, and we got on for the first time ever.”

SCARY SKIN

Paul’s tattoo break came in 1991 when he inked an elaborate back piece – complete with his trademark demons and ripped skin – on his then-girlfriend, and took it to a convention in Pittsburgh. “When we got there it was surreal; the girl couldn’t walk five feet without someone taking a picture. She was hot, which helps,” he laughs. “But at that time the scariest tattoo around was a flaming skull.”

The piece garnered attention and Paul was invited to do an interview with *Tattoo Review*

- 1 An evil leg piece
- 2 'Pistol Packin Mama'
- 3 A terrifying tattoo of Poseidon
- 4 'Seven Deadly Sins'







5 Paul inks 'Alien Battle'

magazine, during which he ripped into the church. "I came straight out of the gate with an attitude, and since then I've experienced a constant rise at a steady pace," he says.

"ALTHOUGH MY STUDIO IS DARK AND CREEPY, PEOPLE FEEL AT HOME IN IT"

Paul's dislike for the church comes from his experiences at a Catholic school he attended. His twisted notebook doodles were born from a hatred of his time there – particularly for his sixth grade (Year Seven) teacher. "I still wake up gritting my teeth, dwelling on her," he says. "She put me through psychological torment and constant

humiliation. She pulled me in front of the class to mock me. She left me with permanent mental scars and filled me with contempt." As a result, Paul still doesn't like being around nuns or priests. "They fill me with anxiety and anger," he explains.

However, Paul has channelled that negativity through his no-holds-barred art, which includes weird black and grey creatures and faces, and the teacher he loathed has become a key element in his work. "Her likeness is in my demons," he says. "I've realised she defined my art – she's the mother of the Booth style."

Facing his inner demons enables Paul to create the raw, emotionally compelling work he's known for. "I can't ignore the dark side if I want enlightenment," he says. "Blind faith in the light is the epitome of the Christian fool. I can't live that way. The more I struggle the wiser, stronger and more dangerous I become."



6



7



8



HAUNTED HOUSE

That philosophy led Paul to work on a new approach to dark art, and in 1995 he opened Last Rites Tattoo Theatre in New York. "My clients and myself connect here," he says. "And even though it's dark and creepy, people feel at home, although they can't quite figure out why."

Last Rites is a creative hub and Paul uses the place to write ambient music, pen dramas – he's currently working on a screenplay called *The Damnation Of Faust* – and throw legendary parties. "I had a do there last year to celebrate being in the business 20 years," Paul recalls. "We had a carving table with meat on it, so we got a naked girl, lay her on vegetables and covered her in beef and fake blood. Then we used tongs to tear the meat off her flesh – it was great, and 12 people stormed out. If you get my jokes you'll laugh with me, but if you don't, I'll laugh anyway."

Paul's favourite client was Slayer's Kerry King. Nicholas Cage is also a fan of Paul's work, and the actor would have a Booth original on his scalp now if the studio executives on *Kick-Ass* hadn't stopped him. "He didn't have the freedom to get the tattoo," sighs Paul. "But he's an awesome guy."

The tattooist has also had plenty of weird requests. "One guy offered to let me cut his toes off, saying they never really felt like his own," he recalls. "I called my lawyer and asked, 'Can I do this?' Hey, he didn't want them and, as far as I was concerned, there was a jar on my shelf with his toes' names on it! But I was told I couldn't do it."

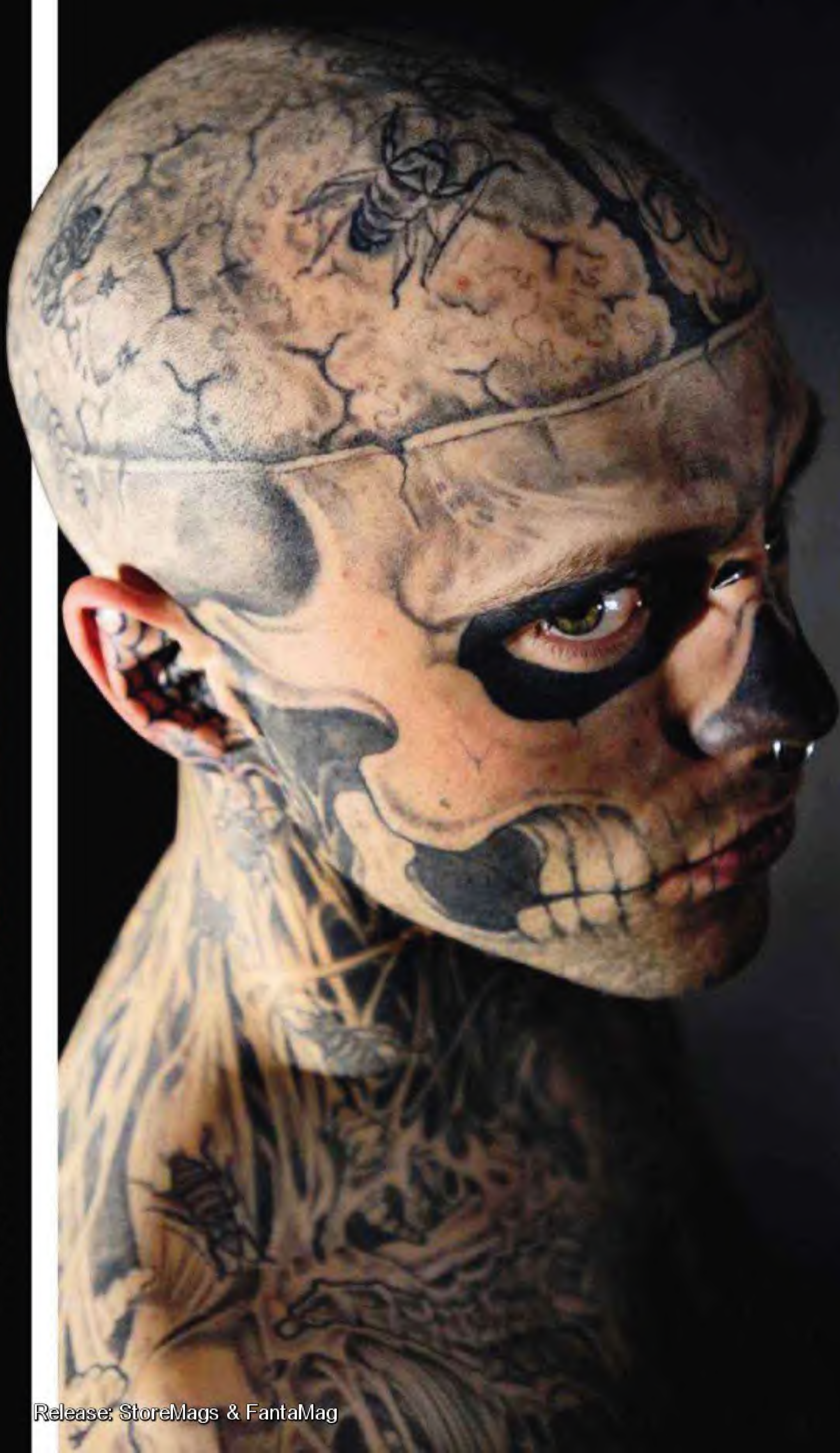
Now Paul thinks his career may be moving in a new direction. "I feel like I've come full circle," he says. "I've come from nowhere to everywhere, and now I'm going back to nowhere again, so I'm starting my life over in new ways. But don't worry, it's even darker than it was before!"

6 'The True Eyes Of God'

7 'The Glutton King'

8 Paul's an expert when it comes to tattooing dark, tentacled beasts

HORROR GALLERY



Release: StoreMags & FantaMag



TATTOOIST Frank Lewis at Derm FX Tattoo, Montreal, Quebec, Canada
COLLECTOR Rick Genest, AKA Zombie Boy, Montreal:
 "When I was a kid, I wanted to be a Ninja Turtle, but as I got older I fell in love with zombies and I wanted to become one."



1

TATTOOIST Steve Oliver at A Breed Apart Tattoo Studio, Mirfield, West Yorkshire

COLLECTOR Matt Trotter, Leeds: "I got this because I like skulls and fire!"

TATTOOIST Jon at Pierced Up, Bristol

COLLECTOR Simon Robinson, Bristol: "This is the title of a Hatebreed song."

TATTOOIST Andrew Lloyd, North Wales

COLLECTOR Jane Mosley, North Wales:

"This is a Buena Vista piece, but I added eyes to make her look more friendly."

TATTOOIST Drew Romero at Time And Triumph, Monmouth, Wales

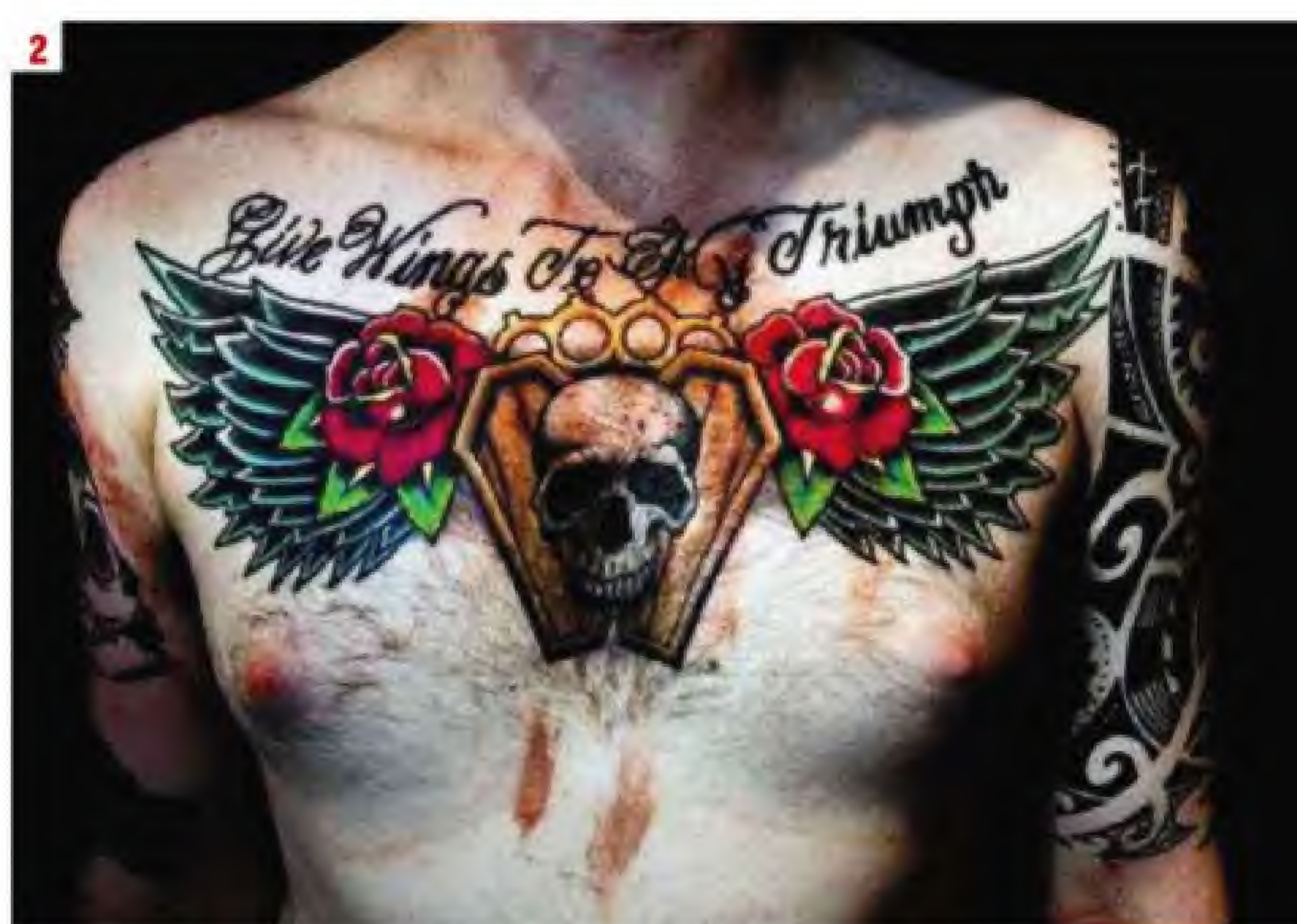
COLLECTOR Evelyn Lindsay: "I'm obsessed with magpies and old, pretty things."

TATTOOIST Fat at Fat Tattoos, Spain

COLLECTOR Dana Hall, Dagenham, Essex:

"This piece is inspired by the vampire artwork of Spanish illustrator Victoria Frances."

2



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5



TATTOOIST Matt Hunt
at Modern Body Art,
Birmingham
COLLECTOR Tom
Devine, Birmingham:
"This is from one of
Matt's paintings."

BIOMECHANICAL ICON

NICK BAXTER

THE BIOMECHANICAL WONDER WITH
A FEEL FOR THE SURREAL



Combining biomechanical styles with surreal ideas and neon colours, Nick has developed a visceral artistic style and is well on his way to becoming one of the tattooing greats. Advanced layering techniques are the key to his incredible designs. He drives ink into the skin, lets a layer of tattoo pigment heal, and then tattoos over it again with different colours. "This allows me to work with colour in complex way, to achieve a range of subtlety and nuance not possible with single-application, formulaic tattooing," explains Nick.

With over 10 years working the needles, endorsement from legendary biomechanical inker Guy Aitchison, and a clutch of exhibitions under his belt – including a show at Paul Booth's Last Rites Gallery in New York – Nick's career is on the up.



PAINTING THE FUTURE

Nick grew up in New Haven, Connecticut, where he went to art college and learned the basics of sharp-focus still life painting in the classic *trompe*

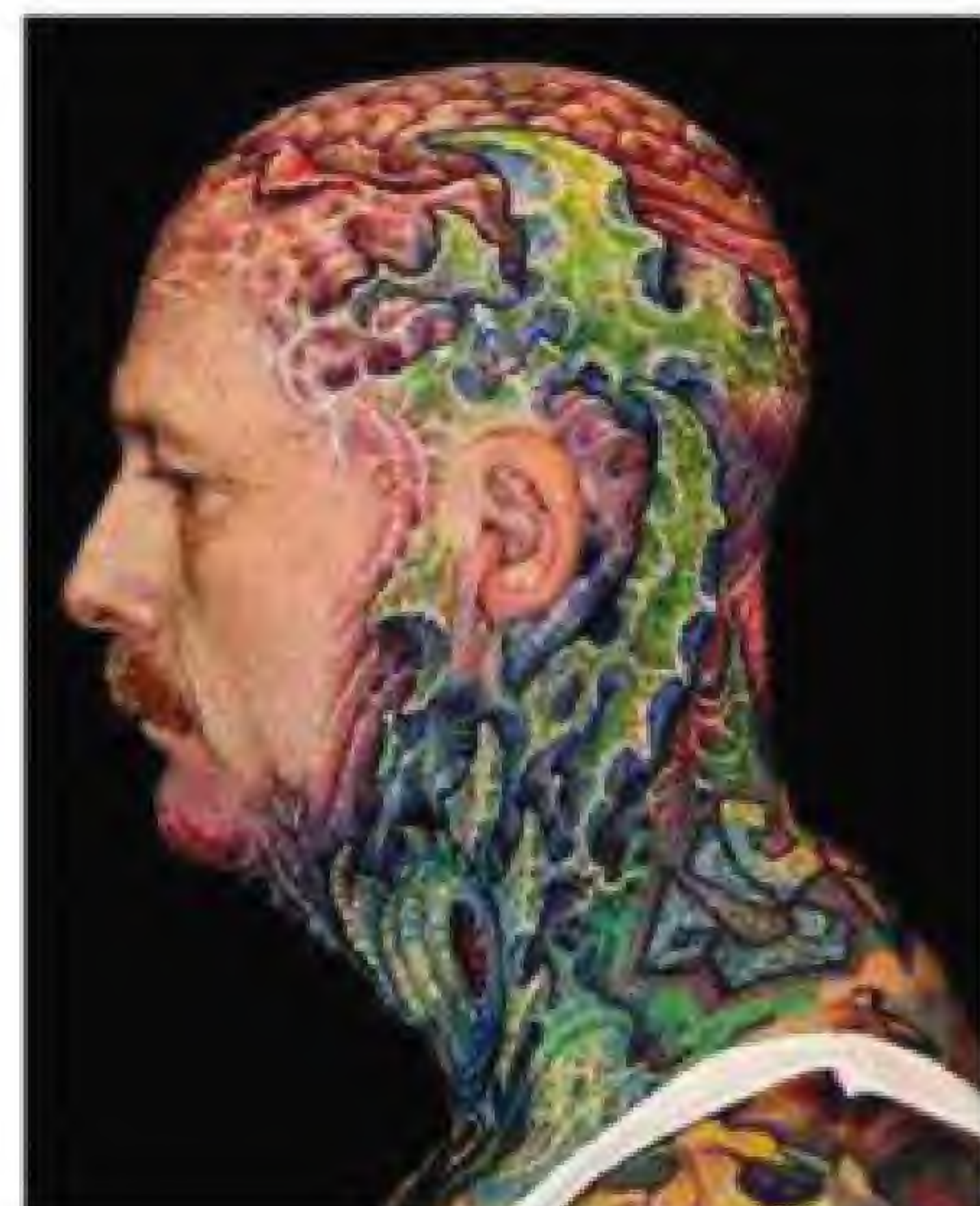
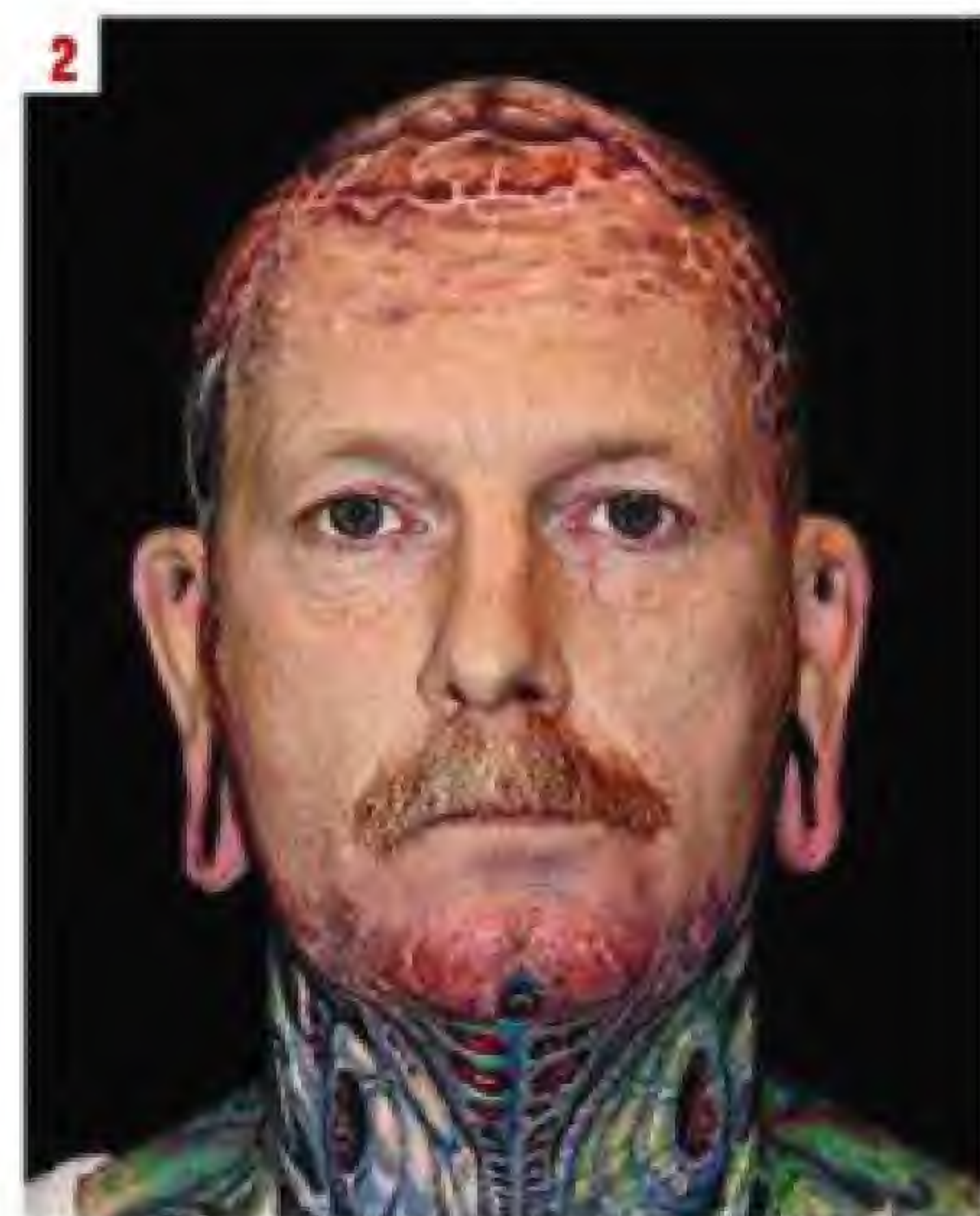
“I GOT INTERESTED IN THE SOCIAL REBELLION SURROUNDING TATTOOS”

1 'Fantasy Floral Back Piece'

Nick inked the head and neck of this client, Jack Morton. The throat piece is a collaboration with Guy Aitchison and Don McDonald

l'oeil style. A few months after he turned 18, he got flames tattooed on his forearm and became increasingly fascinated with ink – not only with the brilliant designs that could be achieved with needles, but the reasons why people got them – before dropping out of school to pursue tattooing.

“It was in my early teens that I became interested in knowing more about the self-expression and social and cultural rebellion surrounding tattoos,” Nick





remembers. "I started hanging out at tattoo studios until one of them, Tattoo International in Wallingford, Connecticut, offered me an apprenticeship."

On New Year's day, 2001, Nick inked his first tattoo – a cartoon character on one of his co-workers. He later moved on to Darkside Tattoo, where he'd had his first piece of ink, and when Darkside closed down Nick and several of his colleagues formed Transcend Tattoo, which included an art gallery to promote other forms of expression besides inking. In 2008, Nick relocated to Austin, Texas.

WHAT A GUY

Nick's bright biomechanical work clearly references Guy Aitchison. "I think there's some obvious Aitchison influence in my work, and I freely admit to him being a tattooer I've always looked up to – I appreciate not only his artistic vision, but how he conducts himself and his work ethic," Nick

enthuses. "Though hopefully it shows that I've developed my own tattoo style and artistic approach. I've always tried to forge my own path, and develop myself fully as an artist and as a person."

Nick finished off an elaborate neck tattoo that Aitchison had worked on (see left). He confesses he was nervous at first, but soon settled into his own "artistic vibe" and enjoyed adding his own artwork. The pinnacle of Nick's career so far has been tattooing Aitchison himself (overleaf). "Tattooing him was the fruit of my hard work," says Nick.

GRAND DESIGNS

To stay true to his ideals, Nick rejects any ideas that he doesn't feel passionately about. "I'll politely decline anything I don't feel inspired by or motivated towards," he explains. "It sounds snobby to do things that way, but it keeps my work honest, sincere, and top-quality by ensuring I feel artistically enthused."

3 Nick inked this "bio-organic cocoon throat piece" on tattooist Durb Morrison



“TATTOOING **GUY AITCHISON** WAS THE FRUIT OF MY HARD WORK”

4 This 'Raven Skull Bonescape' was completed on a client called Clint over two long sessions

5 'Meatcase/briefsteak' on tattooist Jeff Ensminger

6 This piece was inked on a client called Heather, over three sessions totalling 17 hours



But tattooing is a two-way street, and despite Nick's working practices, he confesses that not every moment of his inking journey has been enjoyable. "There have been a few times where clients came back to me expressing great unhappiness with their finished tattoo, due to their tastes or feelings changing since the time they agreed on the artwork I presented," he sighs.

Modest about the quality of his work, Nick professes that he's always striving for better results.

"I'm happy with many of the tattoos I've done, yet at the same time I'm an eternal perfectionist, constantly engaged in self-critique and realising what I can do better next time," he reveals. "This is true of even my "best" tattoos."

GOOD VALUES

If you want a piece by Nick, you could be waiting for a long time – he's so in-demand and busy with longtime clients that only a small percentage of the people who contact him end up getting tattooed. But if you're lucky, you may be able to get your hands on limited edition prints of his paintings, as Nick continues to make his mark on canvas and experiment with digital art.

The inker also aims to pass his knowledge on to others. In 2010, he finished a 13-page instructional painting book, called *Sharp-Focus Realism In Oil*, which was published by Aitchison's Proton Press and features many of Nick's paintings. He's also planning to run educational seminars.

Aside from tattooing, Nick has an affinity for anarchist principles, and lives a straight-edge vegan lifestyle. Click through his website and you'll find links to texts by famous thinkers, along with Nick's own thoughts on capitalism and commodification. Yet despite Nick's strong belief system and refined tastes in art, he still gets asked to do rude and crude tattoos. "It started when an Englishman asked me to do a vagina the size of a full sleeve," explains Nick. "I've been asked to do quite a few since then. People must look at my website and figure I'm the guy to go to!"



7

- 7 'Vision' is influenced by Guy Aitchison
- 8 A 'Ghost Orchid' chest piece, and a mother octopus guarding her string of eggs
- 9 Nick reworked an existing design on Guy Aitchison's inner arm

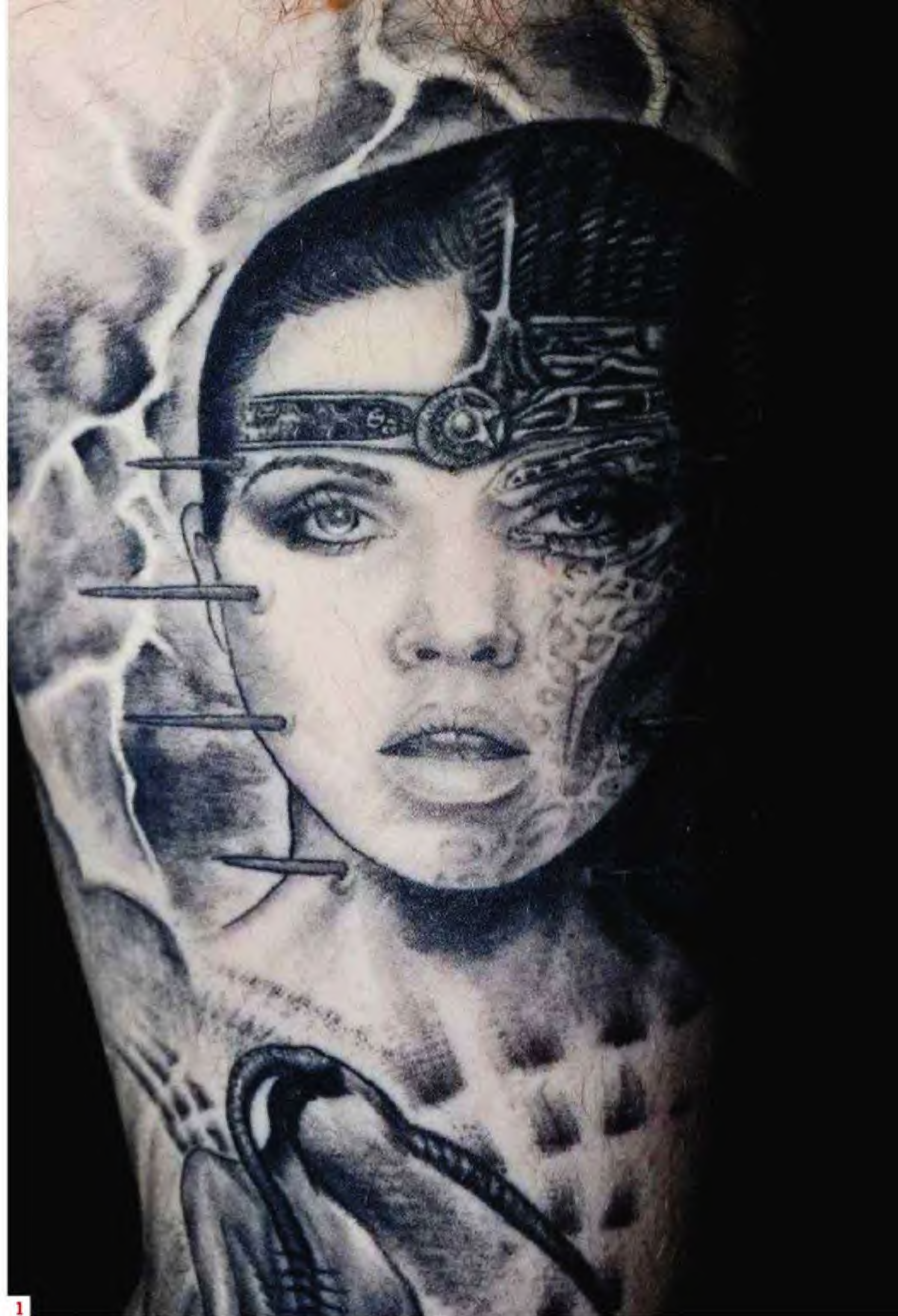


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BIO-MECHANICAL GALLERY



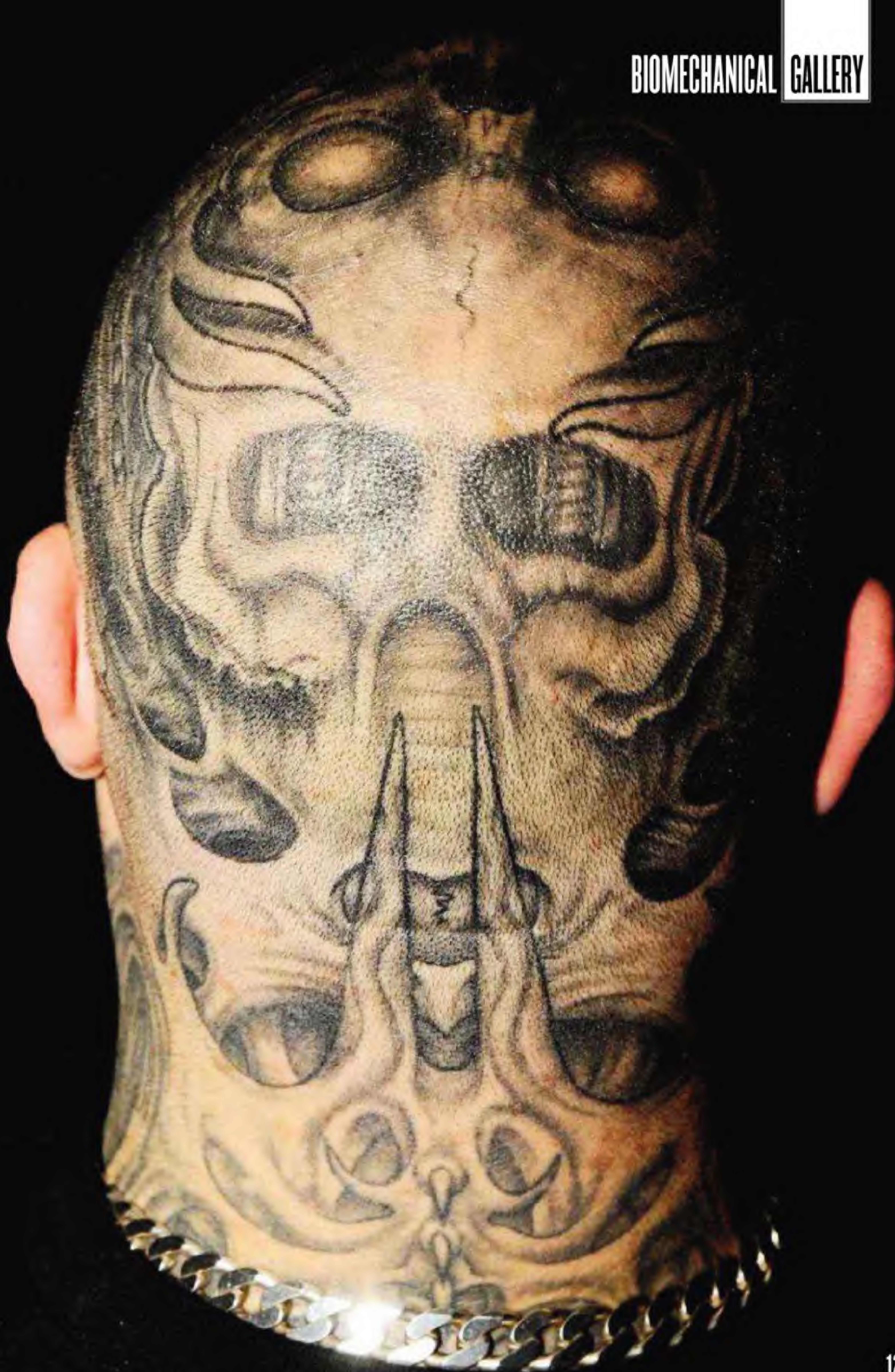
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TATTOOIST Chantale Coady at Montana Studios, Bath

COLLECTOR Nick Thomson, Salisbury, Wiltshire: "This Giger piece was the cover artwork of Blondie's *Koo Koo* album."

TATTOOIST Ben Fluxx at Octopus Tattoo, Derby

COLLECTOR Kevin Carlin, Doncaster: "This design is inspired by Giger and tattooist Guy Aitchison. Next I'm going to have some more work on my face, and then have my ears coloured in black."

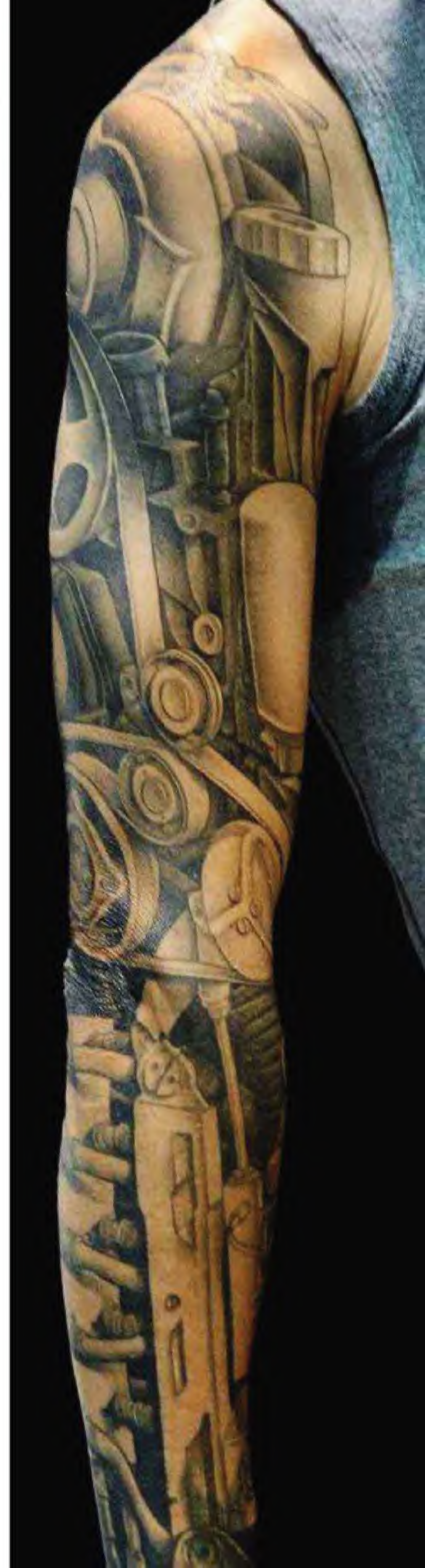


TATTOOIST Steve Oliver at A Breed Apart Tattoo Studio, Mirfield
COLLECTOR Matt Trotter, Leeds: "I'm influenced by Giger and I like skulls."



TATTOOIST Mark Gibson at Monki Do Tattoo Studio, Belper, Derbyshire
COLLECTOR Sean Wood, Leeds: "I operate excavators, and this piece is made up of JCB machine parts."

4



5

TATTOOIST Kevin Carlin at Sacred Skin, Doncaster

COLLECTOR Steve Staples, Doncaster:
"This is based on a Guy Aitchison piece, and I have several other biomechanical tattoos - including a facehugger from *Alien*."

6



TATTOOIST Kevin Carlin at Sacred Skin, Doncaster

COLLECTOR Steve Staples, Doncaster:
"I saw a sculpture of this Giger piece, 'Li I', in Kev's shop, and he said it'd work well for the size of my arm."

DIRECTORY

FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE AMAZING ARTISTS FEATURED IN THIS BOOK

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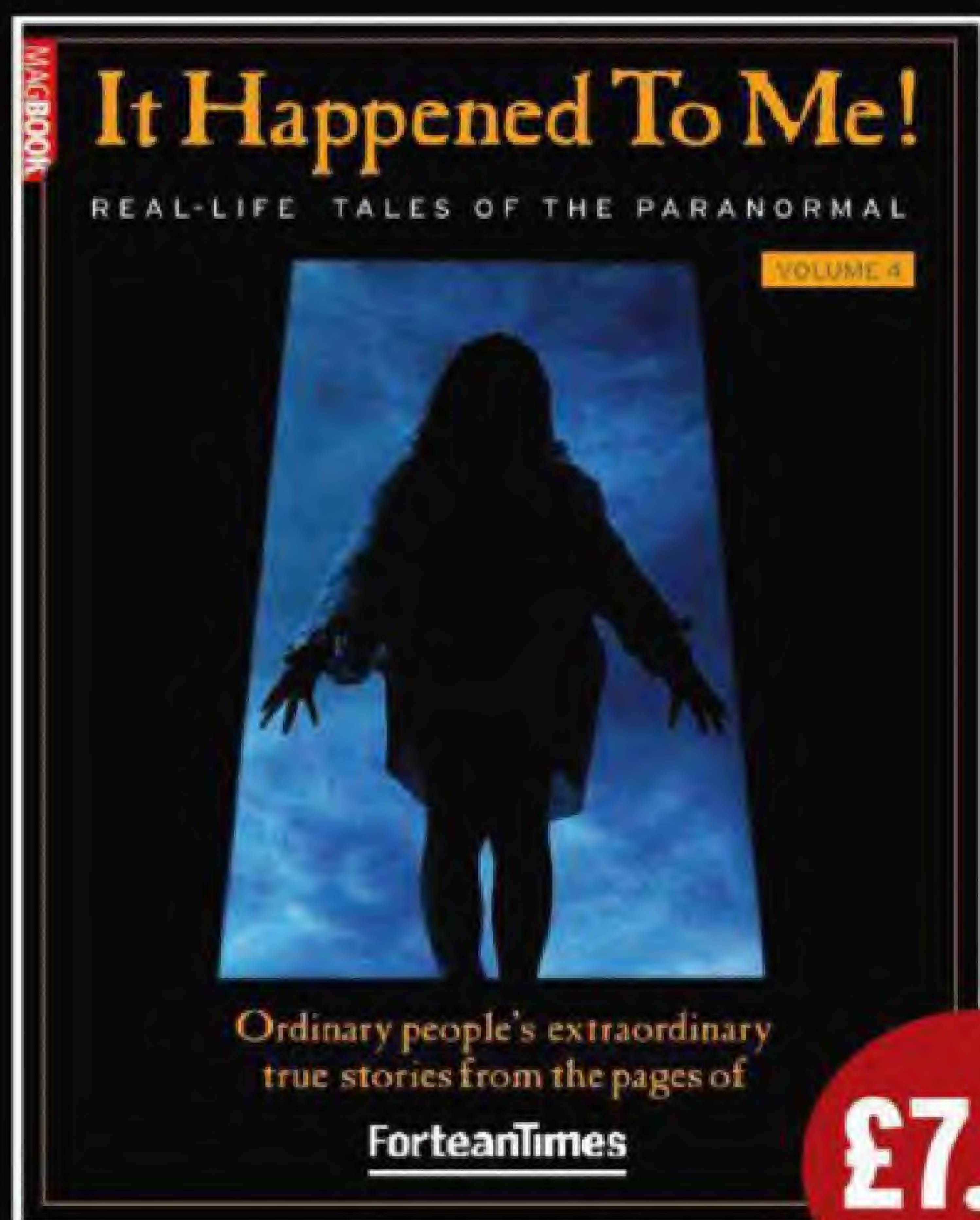


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